

**Danger ahead: don't dial into disaster**

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way to ensure high levels of success is to pursue an active, intelligent and effective collections operation, using a combination of the appropriate dialling technology and effective call recycling. Whether you are running a small, medium or large centre, the principle is the same; if you are clever and dynamic with your contact strategy you are more likely to see results.

*Danny Singer, managing director, Noetica*

## Hosted diallers: benefits, and questions to ask



TODAY'S hosted diallers, with their rich set of features, offer a compelling alternative to traditional and expensive on-site diallers. Some of the benefits are:

- No upfront investment in software/hardware; just a small set-up fee and monthly payments based on the number users.
- Immediate compliance to Ofcom's silent calls regulations.
- With no infrastructure limits, they provide the ability to ramp up immediately during peak times.
- Hosted diallers can be accessed from anywhere, making them well suited for companies with "virtual" call centres or remote agents.
- They come with a range of support services that are normally available 24/7.

The hosted dialler is fast becoming an essential tool for connecting virtual agents to large numbers of live contacts in a short window of time. Hosted diallers can make hundreds or thousands of outbound calls simultaneously and filter out everything except a live answer. Consequently, hosted diallers are at the heart of modern outbound calling operations that typically generate revenue streams through telemarketing, debt collection, information gathering, customer surveys, market research, appointment setting, data cleansing, etc.

The core elements of hosted diallers include leading edge call progress detection and sophisticated algorithms that dynamically control the number of calls based on agent availability so that they comply with the stringent silent call regulations without sacrificing productivity and efficiency.

When choosing your hosted dialler supplier, check that their systems are in secure state-of-the-art data centres and reside on highly scalable architecture (N+1 redundancy) with failover to a second system that maximises availability and prevents outages. Ideally, you should select a supplier who can provide 99.99 per cent uptime with backup contingency.

Although the new hosted diallers have been designed to achieve compliance, it is still your responsibility to use them ethically, intelligently and in line with the Ofcom regulations.

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## They're not all the same... how to choose what's best for you



IN THE early days, it seemed that all diallers were pretty much the same and it fell to the dialler manager to squeeze extra performance from the system. Tweaking a setting here or a parameter there could make the difference between a high performing campaign – and make a hero of the dialler manager – and a campaign that at best under-performed, at worst broke all regulations.

Now, all diallers are not the same. Indeed, it's not a question of whether they are in the same ballpark. Some are not even on the same continent. This makes your choice all the more critical.

With inbound, it's less critical – there are other factors that prompt calls from your customers. A particular inbound system might have better functionality, speed, reporting, etc. The bells and whistles might well warrant the choice of one technology over another.

However, once we're looking at outbound performance really matters and the technology you choose is crucial. Assuming all else is equal on the regulatory compliance front, if one dialler can get your agents talking to more people per hour than another, it's fair to assume that the result should be more sales, more appointment booking, more market research or more of whatever it was you wanted to talk to your customers about.

Much consideration should be given to the nature of your campaigns – how they are targeted, what is said, how much scripting is used, etc. All of these are important and warrant much thought, planning and on-going review. All of them will affect your results. But it's not hard to see how the biggest factor is the number of customers your agents get through to.

Two things are particularly important. First is detection. It's necessary to detect that the agent is connected to a real person. Many call centres allow their most valuable and expensive resource, people, to do some form of detection. The agent decides if they're speaking to a live person or not. And, being human, they are very good at it.

The latest technology can be almost as good as the human ear at detecting a genuine human voice. So a dialler that has "live speaker detection" (LSD) rather than simple "answering machine detection" (AMD) can be incredibly accurate and remove the problem of unnecessary calls getting through to agents.

Determining a real, live person is one thing. It must also be done very quickly – fast enough to comply with regulations such as Ofcom's.

This is not as easy as it sounds, hence prompting many dialler vendors to recommend that their customers turn off AMD. A dialler that is accurate and fast removes this problem. And it removes the need to use

those costly people to detect answering machines, etc.

Once it is known a real, live person has just answered, they must be connected through to an agent. This is where the dialler's algorithm must match the amount of over-dialling to the number of available agents, ensuring that each customer will always be able to talk to an agent and thus avoiding a silent call.

There is a raft of information that can be processed to make this as accurate as possible and it is here that computers win over the dialler manager. In the same way that chess software can beat a grand master, a predictive dialler is able to consider many variables at speed, allowing an accurate prediction of when each agent will become free to take the next call.

Don't consider the predictive dialler in isolation, but rather as a crucial component in an outbound system.

Campaign management software and agent front end are critically important. These will also have a direct impact on results and performance, plus agent and customer

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satisfaction. It is at this point that data is managed and campaigns can be targeted for best results. Modern campaign management software allows you to run true multi-level campaigns, with results from previous campaigns automatically feeding follow-up campaigns. Additionally, agents can be allocated to individual

campaigns, where their skill-sets (or even accents) can achieve the best impact with the particular customers targeted.

Lastly, consider the question of a hosted or premises-based (CPE) solution. Much as hosted solutions are the new kids on the block, there are advantages to each model. Can you use your chosen technology as hosted, premises-based or, if necessary, a mixture of both (for instance, to deal with peaks in demand such as Christmas, holidays, etc.).

Do not be forced to choose between a premises based or hosted solution.

In the same way that buying or hiring a car can have different advantages at different times, so an outbound system than can be rented or installed on-site will meet changing requirements. Business demands can be fulfilled by a hosted solution in isolation or by one that sits side by side with an on-site dialler/outbound system.

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