How Many Customers Can You Help at the Same Time?

How media concurrency in omni-channel contact centers maximizes agents' interactions

Do you find it easier to multi-task at some times more than others? A one-on-one voice conversation might require your complete attention, but you could easily text or chat online with several different people while easily keeping up your end of the individual conversations. It's the same for agents in the contact center. Instead of introducing more complexity, multiple channels can actually make it easier to manage a large queue – if they're routed intelligently. Find out how Zipwire™ media concurrency routing takes the priority and form of interactions into account to serve more customers at once, while providing high-quality service.

In today's omni-channel environment, contact center agents facing a blended queue of interactions from different channels like voice, video, email and chat can easily multi-task - if we are cognizant of the types of conversations they're being asked to handle. The first step in going beyond the binary "busy" or "ready" agent states and empowering agents to intelligently multi-task is to differentiate between the types of *synchronous* and *asynchronous* channels used by customers when interacting with a live agent.

Synchronous channels like voice and video facilitate real-time interactions and will require an agent's full attention. There is generally little to no lag between the customer and agent during a voice or a video chat, and the customer would very likely notice a distracted agent attempting to respond to an email while carrying on a conversation.

Asynchronous channels like web chat, email and SMS, however, will often have a lapse between the agent's portion of the conversation and the customer's portion. For example, the time between emails might be a few minutes if the customer instantly drafts a response to the agent's message, or several hours if the customer is busy and the issue is not particularly pressing. Even a channel like web chat, which seems fairly synchronous, usually results in brief lags between the two participants while they type (or while the customer multi-tasks), making it easy for an agent to handle another interaction or two while fielding a web chat - whether that's another chat, or a different asynchronous interaction like an email.

The use of these asynchronous channels is growing – for example, a recent Forrester report on customer service trends showed a 24% increase in web chat utilization over the previous three years. Routing algorithms now need to take the nature of these interactions into account to ensure all customers are served efficiently.
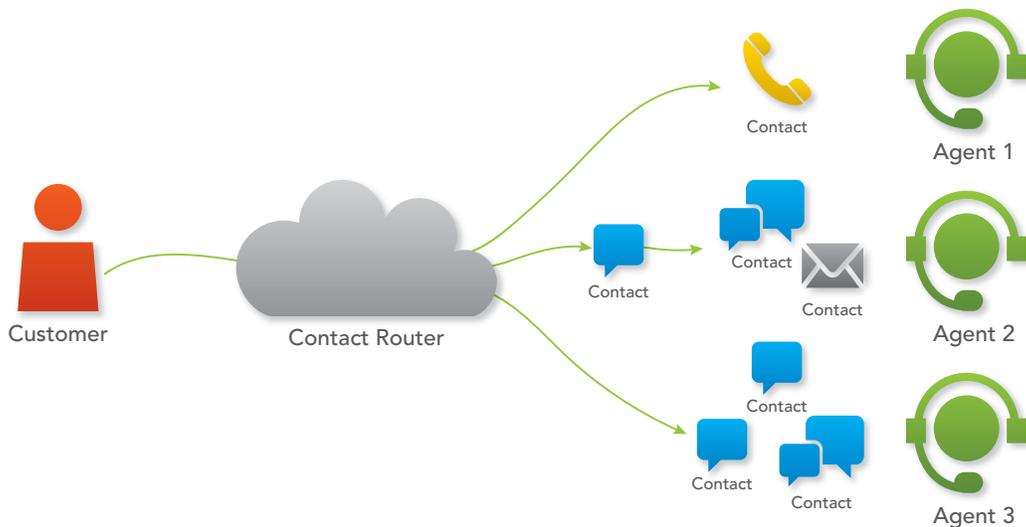
In order to route the appropriate number of interactions to a particular agent, there are three relevant dimensions:

1. How much of the agent's attention is being captured by a given interaction
2. How much available attention the agent has for interactions from another channel
3. The priority of incoming inquiries

We use an algorithm we call *media concurrency* to weight these dimensions of agent interactions.

Here's How it Works in Practice

How much of the agent's attention is being captured by a given interaction? For the synchronous channels discussed earlier in this paper, like voice and video, it's obvious that 100% of the agent's attention is required and they should not be routed any other interactions. However, if the given action is a web chat for order status and the agent is an experienced agent, we can quantify how much of the agent's attention is required for that order lookup.

How much available attention does the agent have for interactions from another channel? We know our agent referenced above should not be routed a voice or video chat, but there may be interactions from other channels that she can easily field - suppose an email with a product question comes in, or another web chat about order status. Our experienced agent could be routed either of these interactions to handle concurrently.

What is the priority of the incoming inquiries? Different channels will also have different weights depending on the latency expected in the interaction. For example, an agent who becomes available after entering the disposition on their most recent interaction might be routed a video chat from the queue instead of being routed multiple emails, as the priority of a synchronous chat with a customer would be higher than the priority of the emails in queue, as some latency is expected in replies to email.

Media concurrency is built into Aspect's Zipwire™ service, making it easy for our customers to efficiently manage a contact center queue that includes interactions on multiple channels. The result of this intelligent form of routing for media concurrency is lower idle times for agents and shorter queuing time for customers, allowing agents to handle more inquiries in a way that's transparent to the customer while providing the same quality of service.

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