SUMMARY

Olive Garden officials identified the need to improve their ability to interact with customers and collect and use their feedback. They chose ePowerCenter to help improve the response time and efficiency of contact center agents, eliminate tedious manual fulfillment and reporting processes, and increase the value of customer feedback to the organization.
Furthermore, ePowerCenter helps Olive Garden quickly identify issues that impact customer satisfaction and provides reporting that helps them evaluate menu items, promotions, and restaurant changes.

These enhancements have improved their operations and elevated the contact center’s status as a source of consumer insight within the organization.

Companies in the restaurant industry face unique challenges when it comes to customer service. Because guests have a more personal relationship with individual restaurants, it is difficult for the corporate office to learn about every experience. Capturing the Voice of the Customer provides companies an advantage over those that rely on restaurant personnel as the only contacts with which guests communicate.

Darden restaurants has taken the lead in the industry by not only capturing their customers’ experiences, but using them to improve their overall operations.

SITUATION

Darden Restaurants Inc., a growing, publicly-traded company based in Orlando, Florida, is one of the country’s largest casual dining restaurant companies. One of Darden’s largest and most recognizable chains is Olive Garden, which operates more than 500 company-owned restaurants across the United States.

Olive Garden officials set out to improve the organization’s ability to interact with customers and to collect and use customer feedback. Prior to this, the means to collect questions, compliments and complaints was limited to phone calls, letters and comment cards located in restaurants. They had not employed any of web-based channels for this purpose.

Soon thereafter, Olive Garden launched a customer feedback form on their website in order to supplement these channels. This opened an important channel for customers to contact Olive Garden, resulting in a 20% increase in overall contact center interaction volume. However, because this feedback form was not integrated with the contact center system, a significant amount of manual data entry was required to process these forms. This had a detrimental effect on the efficiency of Olive Garden’s contact center and agents.

OBJECTIVES

Olive Garden’s situation required a new contact center technology platform. They needed a solution that would:
- Integrate email interactions with other customer feedback channels
- Improve agent efficiency and speed of response
- Automate manual processes
- Increase use of contact center data to identify and resolve issues that impact customer loyalty
- Allow them to get to know their customers better
- Meet Olive Garden’s competitive standards

SOLUTION

Sherri Nelson, Manager of Guest Relations for Olive Garden, and her team received positive reviews upon implementing ePowerCenter from Astute Solutions. It was used by Red Lobster, Olive Garden’s sister restaurant chain within the Darden organization.

Red Lobster was already using ePowerCenter as their contact center management system. They relied on ePowerCenter to integrate multiple communication channels, improve the speed of response through automation and knowledge management, and improve customer data collection and analysis.
After their discussions with Red Lobster and evaluation of other systems on the market, Olive Garden made the decision to deploy ePowerCenter. ePowerCenter offered Olive Garden the capabilities it needed to achieve its objectives, such as integrated email, support for numerous products and reason codes, workflow automation, proactive alerts, automated fulfillment, and sophisticated reporting.

As with Red Lobster, Astute Solutions delivered more than just technology to Olive Garden. Olive Garden commended the Astute Solutions team for the support and expertise they provided throughout and after the implementation.

**ENHANCED EFFICIENCY**

For Olive Garden, the decision to implement ePowerCenter yielded immediate dividends. First, it allowed Nelson and her team to quickly gain control of the growing number of contacts coming in through their website. The overwhelming increase in interaction volume initially led Olive Garden to plan for hiring three new representatives. Now, with the ability to download customer feedback forms directly from the web into ePowerCenter, only one new hire was required. ePowerCenter enables Olive Garden’s agents to deliver higher quality and more efficient service.

Through its integrated knowledge base, ePowerCenter provides agents the specific information they need to address issues and respond to a wide variety of customer questions. These range from questions about an individual item’s nutritional information to the company’s plans for new restaurant locations. “We get a lot of inquiries about nutritional information, so we are responding by creating a nutritional database on our core menu items,” explains Nelson.

Additionally, ePowerCenter greatly enhanced their ability to address and manage emails. Through its assisted email response capabilities, ePowerCenter enabled the team to improve its email response time by 400 percent. Also, through its batch letter processing and automated fulfillment capabilities, Olive Garden’s agents were freed from tedious manual fulfillment processes.

These new-found capabilities were put to the test when a large number of customers expressed their concern about the company’s decision to advertise on a controversial television program. More than 24,000 contacts were received by the contact center in the 24 hours following the airing of the show. With ePowerCenter, Nelson’s team was able to respond to every inquiry and explain the decision and our policy moving forward—all in a matter of hours.

These enhancements and achievements improved the contact center’s working environment, made for happier agents and gave a significant boost to morale and productivity. In fact, Nelson’s group experienced zero agent turnover long after ePowerCenter was implemented.

**ACTIONABLE REPORTING**

Certainly, these results are impressive, but for Olive Garden, improved efficiency was a means to an end, not an end in itself. “We wanted to do more with the feedback our customers were giving us,” Nelson says. “Getting more efficient was the first step in that process.”

ePowerCenter simplified and improved the reports that came out of the contact center. Now, reports can be generated automatically and sent to interested parties on a scheduled basis. As a result, the time formerly spent on report creation can be better spent on analysis.

Nelson adds that, “Monthly reports are great, but if we have a problem we want to know about it now, not at the end of the month.” ePowerCenter’s Notifier feature is extremely valuable for this purpose. Notifier enables Olive Garden to set thresholds for issues. When the threshold is reached, ePowercenter automatically notifies management so the issue can receive immediate attention.
"We consider our area the red flag area," Nelson continues. "If we see something that needs attention, we red flag it so that other areas of the organization, such as research, marketing, or culinary can address the issue in depth."

One example of raising the red flag occurred when a manicotti dish was removed from the Olive Garden menu. "Based on the volume of contacts we reported on that issue, our culinary team reconsidered the decision and put the item back on the menu," Nelson says. ePowerCenter enabled agents to quickly contact each customer who contacted Olive Garden about the issue, thank them for their feedback, and let them know their opinion had been heard.

Since that time, Nelson and her team have implemented a formal measurement program that leverages ePowerCenter's reports to evaluate the success of individual menu items, menu changes and promotional efforts. The company can compare data from multiple years to determine what went right or wrong with a promotion. ePowerCenter's reports also help Nelson determine where new or promotional items impact the quality and cooking of other meals. As a result of this program, Olive Garden's culinary team has adjusted menu items and preparation processes.

**RESULTS**

With the assistance of ePowerCenter, Olive Garden's contact center has become an indispensable resource for the organization. Company department heads rely on the information it gathers and reports it produces to make strategic decisions. "Our role has been elevated and our value is more appreciated," Nelson says of her department.

Their progression to an automated, more efficient contact center also led to the following results:

- Improved email response times by 400% through assisted email response capabilities
- Managed a 20% increase in customer interactions with just a 12% increase in staff
- Enabled the organization to resolve a crisis issue in a matter of hours through the ability to generate mass email communications with minimal effort
- Eliminated agent turnover by enhancing agent satisfaction
- Evaluated and improved individual menu items, promotions, and processes with insights gleaned from ePowerCenter Reports
- Improved operations and business decisions by providing the rest of the company greater visibility into customer feedback and market data

**ABOUT ASTUTE SOLUTIONS**

With the world’s smartest consumer engagement software, Astute Solutions can help you deliver experiences that build brand loyalty and drive revenue. For nearly 20 years, Astute has provided superior solutions embraced by forward thinking Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies in a variety of industries, including Travel, Hospitality, Consumer Package Goods, Restaurants and Retail.