

ENT and Allergy Associates Prescribes Improved Focus on Customer Service



Ear, Nose and Throat Practice's Call Center Deploys New Platform for Large and Growing Daily Volume, Greatly Diminishing Wait Time

ENT and Allergy Associates, LLP (ENTA), the nation's most prominent ear, nose, throat, allergy and audiology practice, fully understands the importance of being available to answer and respond to patient inquiries of all kinds, from appointment requests to prescription refills. As a result, two years ago ENTA - whose 175 board certified physicians serve patients in 42 offices throughout New York and New Jersey - created a Patient Rapid Response Center (PRRC) with a dedicated staff now totaling 70+ representatives ready to fulfill the *Practice's Call Us Today, See Us Today*[®] pledge.

ENTA's call center is analogous to those in the travel and retail industries. On its highest-volume days, with phone lines open for 12 hours, the PRRC processes some 10,000 calls - at times as many as 1,000 an hour. And given those call volumes, attempting to achieve its ultimate goal of one-minute wait time or less per call is a daunting target, and one which merits the complete attention of the Practice's management.

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– John Monreal, Director of the Patient Rapid Response Center

Challenges

- On busy days, the PRRC takes 10,000 calls — as many as 1,000 an hour.
- Calls are centralized for the practice’s 41 locations and 170+ board-certified physician specialists.
- Call volume fluctuates by day of the week, time of day... and cold and flu seasons!

Despite the fact that the Practice continues to open new offices, ENTA is able to strive to achieve its goal of one-minute or less wait time by rapidly pairing patients with appropriately skilled agents. Currently over 30 offices are routed through PRRC with five different options for incoming callers, so the Practice must plan for at least 150 incoming call variations.

“Our agents often perform like magicians,” noted John Monreal, Director of the PRRC. “Despite the fact that sometimes the call queue screen is lit up like a Christmas tree!”

“Our #1 goal is getting a caller to the right agent,” added Rick Keifer, Senior Director of Technology at ENTA. “Without skills-based routing, we cannot achieve that goal.”

Voice, Multimedia Call Handling

For intelligent routing and other modern call center capabilities, the PRRC relies on Avaya Contact Center Select (ACCS). ACCS gives the Practice a collaborative voice and multimedia call center solution that’s an extension of its phone system, Avaya IP Office. The Practice is already planning to offer callers various additional options such as text, email and chat in the near future.

ENTA has long relied on Avaya IP Office and Avaya contact center solutions. More recently, the Practice moved to ACCS for even more support for its fast-growing call center operations. ACCS provides not only essential skills-based routing, but call recording and multimedia call-handling to help ENTA serve customers in the way they prefer.

“We made the switch to ACCS for its ability to record every call and for multimedia capabilities that will enable us to serve patients in different ways,” Monreal said.

For recording of inbound and outbound calls, IP Office VMPro/Contact Store comes bundled with ACCS. With every call recorded, the PRRC has a valuable bank of recordings for quality monitoring, training and compliance.

Value Created

- The contact center connects most callers with an agent in 1-2 minutes.
- Real-time visual reporting enables rapid adjustments.
- ENTA easily adjusts call routing on the fly to maintain service levels.

Changes on the Fly

ENTA configured ACCS to accommodate its four call types: new patients, existing patients, non-appointment calls and prescriptions. Callers also have a Spanish-language option. Every agent is given a rating level from 1 to 20 based on his or her abilities and experience. Lower-level agents handle simpler calls such as appointment booking while seasoned agents help with needs such as prescription refills.

Patients call the numbers for their desired ENTA offices and then choose the correct option from an automated menu, which kicks off routing to a capable agent. Before answering, agents see caller ID indicating the office the patient is calling and their need, expediting talk time.

As call volumes shift, Monreal makes changes to ACCS on the fly. On a busy Monday during cold and flu season, for example, he can shift more agents to appointment-setting within minutes.

“One of the advantages of ACCS is that it is very easy to create extensions and make changes to agents on the fly,” Monreal said.

Spotting Gaps - in Real Time

Staffing is always a challenge, so Monreal relies on reporting to identify gaps and opportunities to reduce wait and talk time on each call. Specifically, he must allocate the correct number of agents, at the correct experience levels, at the right times of day.

In particular, real-time, visual reporting with Avaya Agent Map™ helps Monreal spot opportunities for immediate improvement - catching issues before they become major problems. He can instantly see agent status, wait times, skill levels and talk durations, and adjust routing or speak with individual agents. He can also plan agent breaks to maintain service levels.

Despite the practice’s exceptional call volume, PRRC maintains low wait and talk times. “Our average wait time is 1-2 minutes,” Monreal stated. “Coming from the travel industry, where the wait time is closer to 10 minutes, I can tell you that is phenomenal.”

“We’re very proud of our metrics,” Keifer added. “We designed our skillsets to get calls to the right person. That’s the only way to get these kinds of figures.”

ENTA is currently planning to bring 10 additional offices onto the call center, raising daily volume to between 12,000 and 14,000 calls. To help manage the load, PRRC plans to add texting and email as additional options for patients to contact PRRC - all possible through ACCS. The Practice will also use outbound calling to return calls automatically after patients have left voicemail messages.

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Solutions

- Avaya IP Office Platform
- Avaya Contact Center Select (ACCS)
- Avaya Voicemail Pro
- Avaya Contact Recorder

About ENT and Allergy Associates, LLP

ENT and Allergy has over 170 physicians practicing in 40+ office locations in Westchester, Putnam, Orange, Dutchess, Rockland, Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York City and northern/central New Jersey. The practice sees over 70,000 patients per month. Each ENT and Allergy Associates clinical location provides access to a full complement of services, including General Adult and Pediatric ENT, Voice and Swallowing, Facial Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery, Disorders of the Inner Ear and Dizziness, Asthma, Clinical Immunology, Diagnostic Audiology, Hearing Aid dispensing, Sleep and CT Services. ENT has a clinical alliance with The Mount Sinai Hospital for the treatment of diseases of the head and neck and esophageal cancer, a clinical alliance with the Montefiore Medical Center for the tertiary treatment of pediatric patients in New York City and the Hudson Valley, a clinical alliance with Northwell Health for the tertiary treatment of pediatric patients in Nassau and Suffolk Counties and a partnership with the American Cancer Society to educate and treat patients with smoking disorders and cancer. The Practice has also expanded its clinical capabilities to include advanced Immunodeficiency trials. ENT and Allergy Associates Management and Marketing teams have been recognized numerous times with awards and accolades including Health Leaders Media 2011 Top Leadership Team in Healthcare, Top Doctor awards, ACS recognition award, AHAA Audiologist awards, The Westchester County Association Big W Awards and the Healthcare Marketing Report Healthcare Advertising Awards. Visit www.entandallergy.com for more information.