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Nov 04, 2008

## Easy access to info 'reduces phone time for call centres'

The more calls a call centre operator can handle, the greater the operator's productivity, and consequently the greater the call centre's profit.

The irony for outsourced call centres is that they would like their operators to spend less time on the phone. The shorter the amount of time an operator spends on the line with one client, the more calls he or she can take in a day.

Information is the key. This sounds simple enough, but is difficult to implement, especially where information is stored on more than one database. Most of the information that operators require to answer customer queries comes from third party systems. This is especially relevant for outsourced call centres that deal with multiple customers on behalf of multiple clients.

To be effective the operator needs access to both the customer's information and the data required to complete the query. The data supplied about the customer by the client is not always sufficient, as not all queries can be accurately predicted. This is especially true for complex service offerings such as software support or insurance products.

New generation Business Intelligence (BI) tools overcome problems by extracting data in a different way. One such tool is Progress Software's EasyAsk. It is designed to make an intelligent search of the whole system and to put words into context. This does not require the traditional OLAP tables, but only that a dictionary that contextualises phrases is set up. Traditional BI tools have long promised to be the solution to this problem, but they have several shortcomings. Reports can take a long time to generate and require IT department resources. These reports are also not always up to date, nor are they accessible to everyone.

EasyAsk aims to empower the call centre operator by giving him or her access to data without needing IT knowledge. This is intended to benefit the call centre since queries can be answered while you are on the phone, eliminating the need to refer unusual queries that may require a call-back. This lightness aims to overcome traditional BI limitations by producing up-to-the-minute reports almost instantaneously, based on questions asked in natural English.

QBCon is a business solution provider that implements EasyAsk in SA. Gustav Piater, the marketing and sales director for QBCon, says: "We have installed EasyAsk in two very large call centres in SA with great success. The lightness of the system and the ease of use have made it possible for operators at both companies to access information that would previously not have been available. It has given both customers a competitive advantage that I believe will soon become a prerequisite for call centre profitability."

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