

Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania

Healthcare/Insurance

CASE STUDY

VHT Products:



2008 Highlights

- **56%** reduction in hold time
- **1:36 minute ASA** with VH vs. 1:59 without VH
- **6.2-point** boost in service level
- **4.3% abandon rate** with VH vs. 5.4% without VH
- **1.5% blocked calls** during a 5-month period – without Virtual Hold, it would have been more than 6%



“Your callback thing is the greatest invention on earth ‘cause I’m not sitting here for 10 minutes going ‘ladeladeda’— you know, holding the phone, waiting while your shoulder is killing you.”

- Blue Cross of NEPA member

Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania (BCNEPA) was founded more than 70 years ago with the mission to provide innovative solutions that support more affordable healthcare, promote personal accountability for health and wellness, and offer superior service and partnership to employers, members, and providers. Headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, BCNEPA is dedicated to providing the best choice of coverage, the largest network of healthcare providers, and an unmatched level of customer service to its 600,000 members in a diverse, 13-county region of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Challenge

BCNEPA’s inbound contact center experiences heavy call volume during open enrollment times – November to December of each year – as well as during group enrollment times, which are often in January and June. These peak periods make it difficult to reach BCNEPA’s customer service goals as set by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, as well as internal BCNEPA goals:

- 60-second average speed to answer (ASA)
- 5-8% abandon rate
- 3-5% blockage rate

During these peak periods, BCNEPA callers may hear an announcement asking them to call back later due to high call volume which isn’t the kind of high quality service BCNEPA member expect, according to Bob McDonald, BCNEPA’s director of customer service.

“Providing excellent customer service is key to boosting customer loyalty for BCNEPA’s members,” McDonald said. “Not answering their calls isn’t likely to improve loyalty.”

Blocked calls and long wait times negatively impact member loyalty, but staffing for the peaks results in inefficiencies during other time periods. How can BCNEPA improve the customer experience while also keeping the budget in check?

Solution

McDonald experienced the Virtual Hold® solution as a consumer and “absolutely loved it,” so when Virtual Hold Technology contacted him, he realized that Virtual Hold might be the perfect way to meet customer service goals and enhance the customer experience. VHT designed the Virtual Hold solution to be the ultimate safety net for unanticipated call volume peaks.

Concierge™ is the core of the Virtual Hold solution that announces the wait time, saves a caller’s place in line, and calls them back when it’s their turn, in the time promised. This technology reduces hold time and improves call center metrics like ASA, service level, and abandons, but what’s even more important is the impact on customer loyalty.

“I like that new callback thing,” said one BCNEPA member. “That’s pretty cool – tell them thank you for that.”

But sometimes “call me later” is better than “call me in a few minutes,” so for those situations, BCNEPA implemented Virtual Hold Rendezvous™, which empowers callers to schedule appointments for up to seven days in the future. When contact center resources are overwhelmed,

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Rendezvous helps dramatically reduce the number of blocked calls and ensure that there are no more than 5% blocked calls.

“Instead of blocking calls, we’re able to offer a better experience for our members, and we’re able to meet our goals as part of the [Blue Cross Blue Shield] association,” McDonald said.

Another standard that BCNEPA must maintain involves outreach activities. Virtual Hold Rapport™ makes it easy to involve the contact center with little disruption to the center’s normal activities.

“We proactively address healthcare issues, and we encourage our members to follow the recommended guidelines for preventative screenings,” McDonald said. “We worked with the health management team to develop a program to remind members to get their annual mammograms. First, we send out letters, and two to three weeks later, we follow up with Virtual Hold calls, leaving a recorded message.”

In its inaugural campaign, BCNEPA reached out to more than 2,000 members and had a 48% success rate. Future Rapport initiatives include post-call surveys and other health-maintenance reminders like flu shots and colon screenings.

With the Virtual Hold solution, BCNEPA members can avoid hold time and receive the great customer service they’re used to. When members call into the contact center, if the wait time is greater than 2 minutes, the Virtual Hold software intercepts the call and offers the member the choice to wait on hold or to receive a callback in the same amount of time as if they had waited on hold. The member is freed from the phone until the next BCNEPA agent is available.

Results

In 2008, the Virtual Hold solution reduced hold time by 56% for BCNEPA members, spurring many members to sing its praises. “Your callback thing is the greatest invention on earth ‘cause I’m not sitting here for 10 minutes going ‘ladeladeda’— you know, holding the phone, waiting while your shoulder is killing you,” according to one member.

Happier members can only lead to one thing: happier agents. Without the venting often experienced following extended hold times, agents’ calls progress a little faster – and more smoothly. “A member wanted to let us know that our callback system is the greatest thing in the world,” said one BCNEPA agent. “It was nice to hear the excitement in her voice.”

Virtual Hold requires little-to-no agent training – just knowledge because Virtual Hold callbacks are presented to agents in the same way as other inbound calls. “We used daily updates and team meetings to educate our agents about Virtual Hold,” McDonald said, “and that was it.”

When a new technology boosts employee morale and customer loyalty, cost savings – \$44,000 in 2007 and 2008 – and hard metrics are just value-adds. But the Virtual Hold solution is more than just a feel-good technology. With improved stats like a 1.2% abandon rate, a 31-second ASA, reduced handle time, and fewer blocked calls, the BCNEPA contact center’s Virtual Hold implementation has been so successful that the center is maximizing the Virtual Hold solution through enhanced services like after-hours callers, feedback management, and mobile solutions.

The members of BCNEPA aren’t the only ones noticing the positive impact of the Virtual Hold solution. In 2009, BCNEPA was recognized by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association with an honorable mention award for best practices in the Inquiry Resolution and Customer Service category. **VHT**

COMPANY SYSTEM PROFILE:

Aspect ACD, routing, and WFM

800,000 calls annually

80 agents

1 call center

3 queues

To learn more about opening new channels of communication into your contact center, contact your Sales Director.



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