How call tracking is becoming ‘conversational intelligence’

Contrary to what many marketers perceive, call volumes have increased in the smartphone era. Phone calls remain a key channel for leads and sales across industries, and call tracking has the distinction of being one of the few ways marketers can track both online and offline leads.

SEOs used to object to call tracking because of the risk that tracking phone numbers displayed on websites would potentially interfere with NAP consistency. However dynamic number insertion, click to call buttons and other approaches have

largely allayed those concerns.

Today call tracking is deployed online as a flexible attribution and lead tracking tool that can be used across media channels.

Lately, some marketers have come to see call tracking services as a "commodity." But there's a lot of innovation and increasing sophistication as the technology evolves from a basic analytics tool into "conversational intelligence." To get a sense of the state of call tracking, I reached out to four companies in the space, Invoca, Marchex, CallRail and Dialog Tech, for their insights and perspective.

Current State of the Art: Attribution

The current bread and butter use case for call tracking is attribution: understanding which channels are driving phone calls. PPC marketers have adopted it to connect phone leads to specific campaigns and keywords. Many search marketers are tracking keywords to conversion events over the phone beyond the call itself (using call recording). That in turn allows marketers to optimize bids on keywords that are driving the most productive calls.

Some marketers use call tracking to A/B test ad creatives and landing pages. Invoca provided an example of how call tracking data can be used to personalize caller experiences as well. Invoca customer DISH Network was able to boost conversions by directing prospects to specific call center agents rather than an online form. Where the web experience was producing conversion rates of 5 percent, the personalized call-center experience generated conversions of 60 percent.

Invoca CEO Gregg Johnson also explained in email that call analytics can be combined with other data for additional

personalization leading to better results. “Like digital data, call data can (and should) be used to provide tons of new information about a caller, including demographic data, product interest, buying stage, customer type and more. By pushing caller audiences into media platforms, CRM systems or other marketing automation platforms, marketers can optimize for the next action.” That can be in email follow-up, web personalization, retargeting or suppressing retargeting for those customers who already converted.

Understanding Customers, Content and Sales

More sophisticated marketers are using calls for omni-channel analytics and retargeting. According to Marchex, some of its customers are retargeting prospects based on the content of their prior calls. This relies on call recording and analysis of transcripts.

“Clients are moving from pure call tracking to learning what happens on the call and the outcome,” said Mark Corley, SVP of Analytics at Marchex. “You can score calls and determine whom to call back, evaluate agent performance and learn what scripts or offers are working.” Accordingly, call analysis can be a highly effective sales enablement and service tool. Call analytics can become the “glue between marketing, sales and service in the real world,” he added.

DialogTech’s VP of Marketing Dave McAnally told me that some of the company’s more advanced clients are building lookalike audiences with call data. “We listen and transcribe calls and then apply AI models to determine what are the characteristics of a really good sales lead.” The calls are scored to determine which types of customers convert. Clients can then build lookalike audiences, using the best lead characteristics for use on third party platforms. Calls become a new source of first party data, according to McAnally. “Once brands figure

out how to turn this into a data input for programmatic that's where the real value is for sure."

CallRail's Director of Demand Generation Mark Sullivan explains that call data is also useful for content marketers. "Content marketers are finding the visitor-level data tied to inbound phone calls invaluable for understanding what they're doing that is effective." In other words: understanding what pieces of content drove site visits, calls and phone conversions.

The Future: AI-Driven, End-to-End Insights

DialogTech's McAnally agrees with Mark Sullivan that call data is a rich source for digital content strategy. He also believes that call data will be critical for optimizing content in a screenless (smart speaker) world.

Sullivan thinks that in the near future we will start to see more customer insights from call analytics, aided by machine learning and AI. He also believes that call data might unlock or simplify multi-touch attribution. "Ironically, the call analytics tools that have made a mark by making attribution accessible and reliable for a single offline conversion may be in the best position to make attribution simpler for the masses of marketers that still find multi-touch, multi-conversion attribution a daunting challenge."

Invoca's Johnson also believes that the future lies with AI-powered speech analytics. "Marketers have begun to rely on machine learning-based predictive models to analyze the spoken conversations happening in their contact centers in order to automatically detect call outcomes across tens of thousands of phone calls per day" (e.g., purchases, appointments, quotes, etc.). He says these tools will surface new customer insights without the need to predefine what they are.

Marchex’s Corley says that call tracking is becoming “customer journey intelligence.” Invoca’s Johnson agrees and adds that the need for human support or sales in complex transactions is unlikely to change. “What will change is how we will be able to use valuable data from these interactions to provide the ultimate experience to consumers and a true end-to-end customer journey view to marketers.”

About The Author

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