



Will These Guys Put Call Centers Out of Business?

By Susan Saldibar

You know those irritating call center people you have to talk to if you have an issue with a billing statement or a technical problem with a computer? They read from a stilted script, keep calling you by your name with phony politeness and leave you with your problem unsolved and your blood pressure through the roof.

But what about when you connect with a person who understands your problem, talks to you in a normal, personable manner, helps you solve the problem and promises to follow up. What a refreshing change. A real person who treats you like a real person. You hang up and say to yourself, “How nice not to be talking to a call center!”

A contact center with compassionate, empathetic agents? Yes!

For a leading U.S. senior living provider with over 250 assisted living and memory care communities, that is exactly the kind of experience their prospects report. That’s why they have been using RealPage’s professional contact center team to handle their 24/7 inquiries for 2 years now, and they wouldn’t trade these caring, compassionate, knowledgeable folks for anything in the world. Even their own sales team!

Why? Partnering with [RealPage](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner) has literally transformed their frontline sales efforts. “This experience has totally changed my perception of what a call center is, or can be,” a senior member of their management team recently told RealPage.

Stop confusing the old stereotype “call center” with today’s “contact center”.

I caught up with Heather Gullickson, Senior Vice President of RealPage, and asked what makes their center so different from others. First of all, she reminds me not to call them a call center. “Most call centers are full of people who are basically there to take messages and move on,” Heather explains. “Our people are not message takers. Our people are much more like counselors,” she adds. So that means they have the qualities of counselors; compassion, knowledge and the desire to be of help. And it is that difference which is earning accolades for the RealPage contact center from senior living communities.

To be fair, some communities are, at first, a little skeptical about using an outside partner to handle their initial contact with a prospective resident and family. They have this image of a call center full of people who are only there to fill their shifts and leave. Hardly the kind of environment one would envision to handle sensitive calls from individuals concerned about aging loved ones.

They are pleasantly surprised to find, however, that, in many cases the RealPage team is more engaged than their own team would be. “Our agents are often moved to tears as they recollect stories of people they’ve helped,” says Heather. Occasionally, a client will even seek to hire a RealPage agent for their own community. Wow. Pretty impressive. So why are senior living communities still reluctant to use a solid contact center to handle their calls?

Is it time to reconsider using a contact center for initial contact calls?

“Unfortunately, most ‘call center’ agents have little to no true understanding of the challenges of those who are searching for a senior care community they can trust. And it shows in the way they handle the call,” Heather told me. “People tend to lump all providers of contact center services in with the worst of the worst and block out any thoughts of ever working with one,” she added.

But Heather sees that changing as senior living communities begin to warm up to the advantages of using a contact center. And they extend beyond the skilled compassionate people to include other benefits. Here are a few of them:

- Nothing falls through the cracks. The center is always there, 24/7 to take, not most, but all incoming inquires. On the spot.
- They do the grunt work for you. As you know, the process of qualification can take time. (Think of how many calls your sales person takes that turn out to be unqualified!)
- They weed out all the unqualified prospects. That includes those who can’t afford your community. “Our agents are highly skilled at qualifying the best fit for your community, so that you don’t have to,” says Heather.
- Your team is free to fine tune their tour and closing capabilities, not chasing a lot of leads that may not be viable.
- They nurture your cooler leads, taking the time to “check in” and keep those prospects engaged. The result is a more qualified, valuable set of leads for sales to follow up.

Consider the potential value to your sales efforts of using this new kind of contact center.

Okay, we’re all pretty jaded when it comes to interactions with call centers. But maybe it’s time for a change in thought. You can’t deny the value a great contact center can provide. The key, of course, is to find a great contact center; one that cares enough to take the time to recruit and train compassionate agents, not order takers. It’s good to know that there are contact centers, like RealPage, who care enough to do that.

RealPage has an on-demand webcast covering how senior living communities can better engage, nurture, and care for their leads. You can [watch it here](#).



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