# Single Point of Contact Service (SPOCS)
# Or…The Customer's Time IS #1
# Or…Being Easy To Work With

Have you ever called an organization and been shuffled from one department to another?  Or, have you called one toll free number and then been given another toll free number to call because you got the wrong support group?  How about the call you made to a customer support line where the person gives you a technically correct, but utterly useless, answer.  Frustrating?  You bet.

Are your customers having the same frustration?  Better find out!

*SPOCS*, as the name may suggest, is the implementation of a collaborative workflow that includes technology and knowledge in a manner whereby a customer only has to make one contact with an organization to accomplish one or more tasks.  Some of the tasks may be:

- Inquiring on availability and price of products or services;

- Placing, changing or canceling an order for products or services;

- Setting up, or inquiring about, an account with your organization;

- Requesting information about employment, investment or public relations;

- Inquiring on the status of an order; or,

- Engaging in some concurrent engineering activities with your organization.

The methodology is designed to overcome the frustration factors.  Essentially, the person that picks up a call on the customer service telephone line needs to have the information available to give to the caller or access immediately to the person that can give the information and conference them into the conversation with the caller.

When the SPOCS methodology is to be delivered via the Internet, then the website must be developed with a logic flow in mind and will normally have a FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions) area.  Recent advances in Unified Communications make SPOCS initiatives extremely efficient.

## SPOCS Implementation

The successful implementation of SPOCS is dependent upon first determining, and acknowledging, the frustration factors of your current and potential customers.  You also need to determine the best communication strategy for use.  Some customers are very comfortable with Internet-based communication and this is the long-term lowest cost alternative for implementing SPOCS.  However, if the product or service being provided
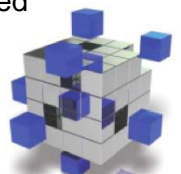
is not compatible with this type of communication then the risk of failure is great. When Internet-based SPOCS is either: (a) not feasible; or, (b) too much of a failure risk, then a telephone-based implementation is the only path to take.

### Determining Frustration Factors

There are a number of methods available to determine the current and potential frustration factors that your customers and prospects are encountering and how they want them corrected. You could send out a customer satisfaction survey in which your organization gives a laundry list of potential issues and leaves space for commentary on issues not covered. You are also going to ask what vehicle the customers would want to use for their communications and what timing they expect on the responses. The problem with this survey is that you may not get a large enough response from the customer base to accurately define or rate the issues. You are also not going to gain much in terms of defining the best solution to the problems that are documented.

The best method that we have found to work is the formation of a customer focus group that will meet with your company's SPOCS team to not only determine the frustration factors but also assist in the development of the solution from both a process management perspective and a technology implementation perspective.

### Solution Requirements

The first step in developing the solution is to define the scope. For instance, will investor relations be part of the scope? In many organizations, because of the nature of the topic, the SPOCS operator would only forward the call to a person that specifically handles the situation and would then disconnect. Once the scope of the solution is defined, an internal team must be nominated. This team should include as a minimum:

- A management sponsor;
- Marketing and/or sales personnel;
- Customer service personnel;
- Personnel from various operational departments;
- Finance personnel; and,
- Information technology.

Any people from departments impacted by the scope (e.g. human resources) should be added to the team.

### Developing the solution

Once the internal team is commissioned, then bring in the customer focus group (CFG) or results from the survey. The method of preferred communication should be obvious from the survey or initial discussion with the CFG. This is the point where a decision will

be made on the type of technology that is required and the information technology people start the research on their end of the requirements (web tools and/or telephone system capabilities and/or wireless capabilities).

The SPOCS team (now including the CFG) now begins to develop a prioritized list of issues to be dealt with in the project.  Once the priorities are set, root causes of the frustration are uncovered.  Categorize the root causes into these sections:

- Causes the customer to call and can be eliminated;

- Causes the customer to call and cannot be eliminated and are deemed to require an immediate response; and,

- Causes the customer to call and cannot be eliminated and are deemed to not require an immediate response.

What this does is allows you to focus resources effectively.  If the cause of the call can be eliminated (e.g. poor billing practices) then it should be a high priority of the organization to fix it.  Once the work flow is developed to respond in a timely manner, then implement by first testing the work flow and technology and then by educating everyone on their role and the importance of fulfilling the role effectively.

Most importantly, hold people accountable for their effectiveness in fulfilling their SPOCS roles.  The customer's satisfaction level is only as good as the last contact that they had with your organization.  Make it a good one.

### About the Author

Ken Cowman's career has spanned over 43 years with 11 of those in operations management followed by more than 30 years as an enterprise solutions and continuous improvement project manager, educator, seminar leader and management coach.  He has had over 70 articles published in various magazines.

A founding executive of the APICS Peel Chapter, Ken was part of the OMERIC team that wrote the Fundamentals of Operations Management courses for APICS.  He is also the past Chair of the Business Operations Management Program Advisory Committee at the School of Business at Centennial College.

Ken is also the author of Emercomm's Lean Enterprise Management methodology and leads the team that develops the LeanControl RTO© applications.

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