



# Automating Quality Assurance

*Jamie Wilson, Public Safety Marketing Manager EMEA at NICE Systems, outlines how an automated approach to quality assurance (QA) enhances human monitoring, enabling team leaders to better focus their activities and efforts. It is about creating the right combination of people, processes and technology. QA has the potential to improve internal efficiency and performance, but also the quality of service perceived by the citizen.*

**P**olice forces need to look carefully at how they currently manage and maintain quality, whilst scrutinising the associated costs. Whilst every police force will have a formula for managing quality there is a real risk of spending excessively and not achieving a clear picture of how individual call takers and the command and control centre as a whole is performing.

For several years there has been major advances made in quality monitoring by commercial contact centres. They have streamlined processes, supported by the latest technologies to identify and share examples of best practice, recognise and react to common trends and potential issues, as well as the ability to pinpoint agents that are above and below the necessary standard. Crucially, they are doing this against a backdrop of operational cost cutting. The endeavours of these contact centres present an ideal opportunity for police forces to learn best practice in the implementation of an affordable QA initiative.

Some police forces are more forward thinking than others and at one end of the spectrum you have those that are assigned QA when they have spare time (so you can imagine how often this occurs in a busy force) and at the opposite end I recently met with a Quality Assurance Officer (the first person with such a title I have had the pleasure of speaking to at a UK police force) who had been recruited from a commercial organisation by the Chief Inspector to instigate a QA management process.

## How is QA being managed in forces today?

Upon return from a site visit one of my colleagues recounted his experience of a QA programme within one of the larger command and control centres in the UK.

He explained that four team leaders were tasked with assessing 40 calls each week from a combination of 999 calls and general enquiries. Each call assessment would take approximately 25 minutes to complete and at the end of the process the call taker would be awarded a score. This lengthy process will often be completed in accordance with the National Call Handling Standards looking at the level of professionalism, empathy that is demonstrated, establishing caller needs as well as hold and wait times. This process equates to 20 hours a week and an annual cost in man-hours of £45,000 per year. Meanwhile the crime-

recording bureau of this particular force spends a further £150,000 per year assessing calls.

The downside of this approach is that only 160 calls are being evaluated per week and this represents a very small percentage of the thousands of calls that are taking place. Given that the aim of QA should be to identify the calls that are failing to meet pre-defined quality standards and in turn get to the root cause of why, it is vitally important to evaluate a representative sample of interactions.

Obviously, the smaller the sample the less information is available on which to base decisions accurately, yet the cost and manpower to scale up to a significantly higher volume of call assessments is prohibitive using this type of process.

This is the same issue that faces commercial contact centres and they have overcome the challenge by further leveraging their investments in digital call recording technology which has enabled them to capture and store every call or interaction that takes place between their agents and customers. This is the very same technology that the vast majority of UK police forces have installed whilst moving from expensive and resource draining tape-based systems.

With every call/interaction being captured and stored digitally, the right foundations are in place to use what are known as quality monitoring tools and techniques. Such software makes it possible to accurately and automatically score 100% of the interactions, based on pre-defined parameters, giving an accurate and total view of call taker, team and overall performance levels.

Once you have this level of insight you can use it make informed decisions to effect an improvement. For example, implement or refine call taker training and coaching initiatives for individuals and groups in order to bridge skills gaps; correct broken internal processes that have been identified (e.g. timely dissemination of information out to call takers, systems crashes or slowdowns affecting call duration); improve workforce scheduling (are there trends in call volumes, or call types that need to be addressed) ensuring the right people with the right skill sets are available at the right times.

Using this approach it is realistically possible to assess calls 50% quicker and for some forces this will equate to over £100,000 in savings per year.



*"Using this approach it is realistically possible to assess calls 50% quicker and for some forces this will equate to over £100,000 in savings per year."*