



Apple Inc.

case study | assessment

Facilitating the learning assessment process to develop more effective and exceptional customer service support to meet Apple's specific business objectives

Solution Overview

Industry: High Technology

Challenge

Deliver a robust and adaptable award winning assessment solution supporting over 1 million exams/year, for over 8000 employees, in multilingual environments worldwide ensuring Apple's customer support agents possess the appropriate skills and knowledge required to achieve exceptional customer service

Benefits

- Increased productivity from the agents
- Improved operational efficiencies
- Improved flexibility in assessment delivery
- Decreased exam design, development, and deployment
- Increased consistency of knowledge across customer support agents

Solution

LearningSource.ams
Assessment Management System

“LearningSource gives Apple a true measure of an agent's skills, knowledge and attitude reacting faster to Apple's business needs... it helps us maintain our competitive advantage.”

Vernon Rooze,
Senior Process and Instructional Designer
Worldwide Contact Center Training, Apple Inc.

Apple Inc. is a corporate name recognized worldwide for innovative and intuitive business and consumer oriented high technology products and is equally synonymous for exceptional customer support and leading customer satisfaction ratings. For Apple, customer loyalty is one of the company's key strategic objectives. The exceptional loyalty customers have towards Apple products and services requires an internal operational focus on the knowledge needs of those that support them; their contact center agents.

Apple customers leading technology product adopters and, along with the company's unique and innovative offerings, drive demand for the products among mainstream users. These highly anticipated leading-edge and innovative products result from their simplicity and intuitiveness allowing for rapid adoption and market acceptance. Customers, however, require a wide range of support from Apple for their innovative products including, but not limited to, product introduction, product utilization, product integration and implementation, and cross-product functionality and compatibility. Apple's worldwide contact center agents must be able to function fluently in any of these areas and be able to immediately and quickly resolve a user's concerns and needs.

The Scenario

Apple's contact center training group designs and deploys over 1.2 million exams and tests per year to over 8000 contact center support agents in a variety of multilingual environments worldwide continuously. The assessment process is a significant component to determine whether agents are retaining and applying the new skills and, most importantly, whether Apple's strategic objective for complete customer-focus is being met.

Apple's contact center agents are the leading experts in all of the products and services. The company's reputation rests on how responsive and knowledgeable the staff is resolving customer requests. Anything less than a complete customer resolution is unacceptable. This is unprecedented amount of pressure on Apple's learning support function. For Apple, employee skills development is a continuous process along always attempting to identify specific skills gaps. The skills assessment process must be fluid allowing the training group to align every learning objective with the strategic goals of the company.

The skills development process for experienced agents, although intense, is seamless. The challenge occurs when hiring and integrating new customer support agents. The due diligence of the skills development and assessment process must be thorough. Apple's "New Agent Training" (NAT) process is the foundation for an agents success and key to meeting the company's business objectives for complete customer satisfaction and maintaining positive market perception.



Apple's worldwide contact center training group is responsible for the skills development of over 8000 contact center agents. According to Vernon Rooze, senior process and instructional designer, "We continually face cycles in the agent training process due to the regular turnover in the contact center staff. Even though our attrition is significantly less than the market, at any given time our learning must be able to ramp up quickly, especially for new agent hires during peak periods."

Contact center agents must effectively support various product groups worldwide for both internal and external clients in English, Japanese, and Chinese including but not limited to: iPod, iPhone, enterprise and professional applications, wireless multimedia group, dotMac support, Internet services, and iTunes store support. By hiring new agents, development of innovative products, and continuous market growth, knowledge retention and application is crucial. This requires continuous knowledge testing to monitor and assess each agent's effectiveness.

"We have been doing a considerable amount of testing but our current assessment infrastructure could not support the growth and demand facing us", according to Vernon Rooze, "we needed to find an assessment system that would provide us with the flexibility, adaptability, and capable of supporting the demands of Apple's growth."

The Solution

With over 8000 agents requiring continuous knowledge development and reinforcement "testing" is front and center. Apple sought an assessment management system that provided the ability to use content in a variety of ways, enhanced and various levels of security, and support over 100 trainers at any point in time.

The learning team required a dynamic environment allowing curriculum advisors to rapidly create and modify exams and questions, the ability to create a various types of questions, allow trainers to view participant results and accessibility to real historical data without contaminating the tests, and also prevent the deletion or modification of the tests and results. Vernon Rooze clearly outlined that security and complete flexibility would be atop of their "what we need" list.

“Where other assessment companies were inflexible and did not understand our business, CentralKnowledge’s team did not have any trouble understanding our specific needs and are always responsive to our request.”

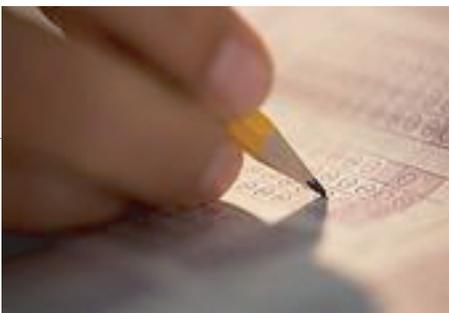
Vernon Rooze, Senior Process and Instructional Designer
Worldwide Contact Center Training, Apple Inc.

The level of knowledge contact center agents is an area that directly reflects upon the Apple's market perception. For the Contact Center training administrators frequent and robust reporting is essential in maintaining the knowledge levels of the agents while providing real-time data to the trainers and curriculum advisors.

Recognizing the need to move to a flexible, globally scalable assessment solution Apple Inc. selected the CentralKnowledge award-winning "LearningSource.ams" assessment management system, enterprise edition. The Apple contact center training group could now meet every assessment requirement presented to them and expected of them in an efficient and timely manner while meeting the needs of the training group and the contact center agents. The LearningSource.ams from CentralKnowledge provides Apple with everything they need to author, administer, deliver, and report on computerized or text-based assessments.

After a detailed software audit, LearningSource delivered in every way Apple expected. Within the first 8 months, the Apple contact center training group had over 22000 people integrated in the system with over 8000 active at any given time and growing. Administratively, LearningSource.ams accommodates a global training staff with 25 in Austin, Texas, 12 in Cork, Ireland, and 3 in Japan with a host of trainers and curriculum managers involved on a daily, if not hourly basis.

Vernon Rooze claims, "Our previous assessment system could only handle 1/10th of what we are doing with LearningSource. We went through a time consuming process to create a new exam every time we tested our people and it did not provide the security and flexibility LearningSource.ams now gives us." Apple can now test what students need to know and be relevant to business objectives. Apple now possesses a true measure of an agent's skills, knowledge and attitude and can react faster to specific business needs. As Vernon states, "it helps us maintain our competitive advantage."



“ Our tests and assessment process are now more relevant and reflect the knowledge and attitudes for the staff and testing needs. We can even target more specifically the areas we need to focus upon in our testing. **”**

Vernon Rooze, Senior Process and Instructional Designer
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Apple’s contact center training group’s thorough assessment process ensures adherence to their business objectives. With LearningSource.ams, contact center agents proceeding regularly through several assessment levels. Agents have unlimited access to quizzes reinforcing the skills required for their job. Agent’s then have two attempts to complete specific tests qualifying them to complete an exam achieving a minimum assessment level depending on the type of assessment. This process is supported with a series of post-tests and surveys. This is how LearningSource.ams manages Apple’s demanding assessment process.

Apple clearly proves LearningSource’s effectiveness. Vernon Rooze claims, “We were able to ramp up very quickly since its implementation and currently conduct over 30,000 tests and exams per week, over 120,000 per month and steadily increasing.” He continues to say, “Our old system had us taking 4 to 6 hours to create a new test but now we can easily create or modify a test in less than 15 to 30 minutes. For example, skills and knowledge for the iPhone for different countries and requires new tests each time. LearningSource gives us the resources which we did not have with our previous test system. The time saving translates to more than just a costs savings; it makes our team more effective in developing our agents and meeting specific objectives.”

Given Apple’s high demand for assessment delivery, one of LearningSource’s frequently used features is delivering a different exam with different levels of difficulty to each student while intelligently recognizing their real-time perfor-

mance. “The randomization of exams, random question pools, and intelligent testing technology means that no two students get the same test. Great for us,” commented Vernon Rooze.

Apple appreciates LearningSource’s comprehensive real-time reporting capability. This provides the training group with immediate and relevant results allowing them to adapt and modify quickly. “We can quickly access the standard reports available through the system or customize each report to our specific needs quickly obtaining the report within a few minutes,” according to Vernon Rooze. On the scale that Apple uses assessments, it’s essential to have reporting capability that enables them to rapidly analyze the validity of questions and assessments. For Apple’s contact center training group immediate results and measures are so critical that testing measures are the first defense to determine whether agents mastered the material and are capable of serving customers exceptionally.

More than answering Apple’s assessment needs, LearningSource.ams also meets other demands. “We are impressed that the system does not diminish in performance but rather keeps pace with our increasing administrative and technical demands... we like it when a product performs to the standards as if it was created by Apple,” said Vernon Rooze.

With Apple’s contact center training group conducting worldwide assessments, the success of LearningSource has caught the attention of other business units within Apple including, “The retail and sales divisions...” according to Vernon Rooze.

Results and the Future

CentralKnowledge successfully helped Apple enhance its assessment requirements using its LearningSource.ams Assessment Management System. Together, CentralKnowledge and Apple were chosen as “*Learning Content Management Project of the Year*” for Training Magazine’s Technology in Action award. Apple’s training group is collaborating with CentralKnowledge’s learning strategists and technical design team in developing the next generation solution tangibly linking specific learning objectives and exam results to Apple’s business and strategic objectives.

Apple can confidently assess contact center agents skills delivering various levels of testing anytime, maintaining security and integrity of results, while benefiting from time savings and scalability. LearningSource.ams ensures the customer support function meets the exceptional standards Apple is recognized for by its customers.

