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Knoa Outlines Offerings, Focus, Marketplace, Upcoming Products By Brendan Read

Knoa Software (www.knoa.com) makes end-user experience and performance management software. Its latest release, Knoa EPM 5.5 introduces advanced end-user analytics, comprehensive alerting, and enhanced correlation and analysis capabilities. These features “enable customers to quickly turn the Knoa end-user and application performance metrics into proactive remediation initiatives to both improve performance and reduce costs,” says the firm.

We caught up with Lori Wizdo, vice president of Marketing at Knoa Software, to find what’s new with the firm, the marketplace, and what to expect from it down the road in the way of innovations:

1. Please outline Knoa Software’s products and solutions.

Knoa offers a family of software products that monitor and collect metrics on exactly what is happening when agents interact with the many software tools and applications on their desktops, such as CRM systems. We collect information in two dimensions. The first set of metrics report the agent experience when using the applications: Are the transaction slow? Are there quality problems? Is the user interface cumbersome? In short, is the agent’s experience with the application hindering effective, efficient performance? The second set of metrics we collect are about agent performance when using those applications: Are the agents using the right applications? Are they using the right transactions for the call type? Are they proficient, or are they making lots of mistakes? In short, how well are the agents using the tools they have been given to facilitate the customer interaction.

We’ve discovered that despite the high levels of monitoring and recording that exist in the contact center this agent/technology interaction is a blind spot in an overall contact center performance management strategy. And it matters! Even in a moderate contact center, there can be thousands of customer interactions across hundreds of agents every day. Each interaction is a data point in the composite customer satisfaction index. Each is a factor in AHT. Each impacts the contact center costs – when inefficiencies ratchet up contact center costs, with higher repeat calls, unnecessary escalations and increased traffic. Despite a seeming glut of metrics, contact center managers do not have comprehensive visibility into agent performance during each and every customer interaction.

2. How long has Knoa had products focusing on contact centers?

Knoa is no stranger to the contact center. Our products are being used in contact centers here in the U.S. and around the world. British Telecom is using our products in their retail and SME contact centers; we’re being used by the second-largest telecom in Mexico; and we’ve got several deployments here in the U.S. in consumer services and utility industries.

But, we are probably a new name to many TMC readers because, to date, we've focused our contact center communications on the IT organizations who support the software applications used in the contact center. These IT teams use Knoa's products to improve business service, manage application performance and reduce the costs of supporting those applications. Over the past few years, our contact center customers have identified some additional and significant gains in achieving their contact center operational goals: like reducing AHT, increasing FCR and improving agent productivity.

3. How do the metrics that you provide enable the improvements in an agent's interaction with CRM technology?

Let me answer that question by giving you a few real-life examples. Knoa captures metrics on agent errors. What errors are being made, by what agents, during which transactions? One consumer energy company identified a particular 'user error' that 90 percent of the agents were making in a fundamental customer validation process. On average, it took the agents nine seconds to recover from this error. With visibility to the problem, the company was able to re-engineer the user interface and eliminate the issue.

To give you another example, Knoa captures a time-synchronized 'play by play' of the actual agent workflow with the application. A consumer travel services company was able to identify (and subsequently eliminate) a series of non-actionable warning messages that the CRM system was presenting to the agents. This simple engineering change was able to strip 15 seconds from a 360 second call flow.

Or consider Knoa's capture of a complete profile of application use. Knoa's software identifies which agents are using which applications--and which transactions--for how long. A consumer entertainment company used Knoa metrics to discover that agents were not using the knowledge management system they had implemented: at a cost of multiple millions. The company implemented a re-launch and re-training initiative which drove utilization to nearly 100 percent. This was correlated to a five percent increase in FCR.

Knoa also captures metrics about the number of system errors that are being presented to the agent. This is really a huge and invisible problem in many contact centers. Agents are very creative at quickly getting around intermittent, non-fatal errors. They don't report them after the fact, and thus the problems continue. A telecommunications company was frankly shocked to discover that agents were being presented with an average of 50 system errors each day. Not only were these errors impacting the AHT, they were usually being transparently communicated to the customer when the agent had to take corrective action.

And as a final example, Knoa captures metrics about the real response times that agents are experiencing. Knoa response time metrics highlighted that a telecommunications company needed to increase capacity for more than 600 desktops. The uplift improved response times and application uptime, which enabled a 10 percent increase in productivity for its business service advisors. The company estimated the revenue protection from the speedy remediation of this problem to be more than \$2 million.

4. There are several monitoring and analytics products in the market that take different approaches to analyzing the customer experience, i.e. BBN, Empirix, Enkata. How does Knoa "fit" into this spectrum of solutions?

I think that question highlights a real condition in the contact center performance management market right now. It is fragmented. There are a great number of good solutions that a contact center executive can consider to improve agent performance and contact center KPIs (key performance indicators). I can't give you a quick 'one-size fits all' answer as to how Knoa is different than these solutions --because they are largely, all unique solutions. I can tell you that there is not another software company that does

exactly what Knoa does exactly the way that we do it. Generally, we are different from other solutions in the contact center market in one of three ways:

(a) The first is the scope of our monitoring coverage. We say that our tools illuminate the last blind spot in the contact center because we can provide insight into every interaction on every call, for every agent. There are other technologies, like quality monitoring for example, that can provide exceptional insight into the agent/customer conversation interaction, but the time and cost to use them renders them viable for only for a subset of the calls.

(b) The second is our dual focus on the ‘experience’ the technology is delivering to the agent and the ‘performance’ of the agent with the technology. Knoa’s products are all about improving the agent’s execution. We are unique in delivering one single tool that helps you pinpoint impediments that the technology is creating and identifying opportunities to improve the way agents are using technology to deliver the customer transaction.

(c) The third stems from the fact that we are collecting data, reporting and alerting in real time. Knoa information can instantly show where system, application and user breakdowns are happening. Problems and errors are happening constantly, but often it’s hard to pinpoint which errors or breakdowns are severely impacting the business, and which are just minor annoyances. We have spoken with customers who have identified instances where a large group of agents was encountering an error, but an underlying system error affecting a smaller group of agents was a bigger influence on their increase in average handle time. Using Knoa it is possible to identify the true impact of problems and prioritize accordingly.

5. If a user had to select one solution among these various alternatives, why should they select Knoa’s?

That’s a fair and challenging question. But, I could not possibly answer that question, in good faith, in this interview. In any specific situation with a specific contact center executive, with specific goals, problems, challenges, I would be delighted to entertain that question. To earn the right to have that conversation, I would point out that Knoa has a proven track record of delivering results in the contact center.

I think it is possible to outline a decision-making framework that I would recommend a company utilize when evaluating the many different options that are presented as options to improve contact center performance.

(a) Time and cost to implement: Every organization is running lean, and trying to get leaner. At the same time, we all know that when economic conditions improve, we all want to be in a strong position to capitalize on the upturn. This is a good time to implement technologies that drive fundamental business improvements. But those technologies must slip into use with hardly an organizational ripple. Knoa’s products are typically implemented and producing results in 6-8 weeks, although in a few cases where the motivation has been extreme, we’ve had the product up and running in a week.

(b) Time to value: Few companies have the benefit of making investments that will deliver return over a 12 -18 month time frame. New technologies and incremental investments must deliver new and incremental benefits immediately. Knoa’s products have a real advantage here. We are providing visibility into an aspect of the contact center that is simply not managed today. In every single customer, we discover “day one” insights that immediately translate into cost reductions or performance improvements.

(c) Effort to use and manage: Right now it is imperative that new technologies accelerate and enhance existing processes and not require the creation of new routines or behaviors. Knoa's metrics are used by contact center managers and support personnel to focus and streamline existing processes and to improve the results from the decisions that are currently being made.

(d) Scope of benefit: I like to say that our software products need to become as good at "multi-tasking" as our employees have become. One of the unique benefits of Knoa's product is that one single monitoring technology provides benefits to a great number of stakeholders in the organization. Training has complete visibility into agent errors that allows them to cost-effectively deliver targeted training. Supervisors have real-time alerting that allows them to pinpoint support efforts. IT has 100 percent visibility into the performance of the technology, so they can proactively resolve problems before business operations are impacted. And the same technology is used by the help desk or end-user support organization to help resolve problems that do impact the agent as quickly as possible.

6. Since Knoa has existed for a considerable amount of time prior to entering the contact center market, please provide us with some background on the company and its core competencies?

Knoa is committed to transforming the performance management industry with end-user experience management solutions that reach beyond simply measuring application performance to monitor, measure, and manage how end-users are utilizing software technologies. Since 2003, Knoa's comprehensive metrics, actionable reports and real-time alerting have been helping our customers increase employee productivity, drive more utilization of existing software investments and improve business process execution. And at that the same time it has been simultaneously reducing the cost of application management and end-user support. In the past few years, Knoa's technology has won 7 awards for innovation and has been acknowledged by industry leaders such as Gartner, Forrester, EMA, and Butler Group. Knoa's solutions are deployed in over 120 countries and are being used by 7 of the Fortune 50 companies.

7. Knoa entered the contact center market during a difficult time for many vendors due to the volatile economy. How are your sales efforts progressing? What have been your most difficult obstacles to overcome? Any surprises?

The most challenging aspect for us in introducing our products to the contact center business is the fact that end-user experience management is a relatively new technology, and as we've just discussed, there are a lot of potential solutions that executives need to evaluate. This is not unexpected, of course. We know that ramping up awareness and educating the marketplace about our company and products will take some time.

We have been quite pleased to discover that once we have a conversation with a contact center executive, demonstrate just how actionable the Knoa metrics are, and discuss our proven track record in delivering results in the complex environment of the contact center, we generally proceed to some level of product evaluation. There really is a blind-spot in the contact center. Things that happen in that blind spot impact agent performance, drive costs up, affect contact center KPIs, and impact customer experience. Once executives understand just how quickly and cost-effectively Knoa can illuminate that blind spot, they are motivated to take action.

8. What can we expect from Knoa in terms of new products and services in the near future?

On the innovation front, this is a very exciting year for Knoa. Just last month we released the latest version of our cornerstone product Experience and Performance Manager: Application Insight which delivers deep application insight and the most advanced analytics in the end-user experience management

industry. The product has been positively received in the analyst community as well as within our customer base.

We are just about to launch a brand new product, Knoa EPM Global Insight (Knoa EPM GI) that will capture and report metrics on all applications being used on each desktop. This product is already being used at some of the top contact centers around the globe, and our customers are thrilled by the benefits they are seeing through the powerful combination of these two products.

We're committed to uncovering those areas of potential improvement that have previously been out of sight. As technology becomes more sophisticated, and therefore more complex, it creates additional challenges for the business and IT folks to be able to measure how the technology is working, or if more problems have been created as a result. Because contact centers are heavily dependent on key applications functioning at peak performance, we work with key industry partners, customers, analysts and others to make sure our products deliver the features and functionality that businesses need.