



Shrinkage Series:

# Social and Informal Learning

Finding Active Wait Time for agents to complete social learning

## Make no mistake, it's a social world.

More than half of Facebook's 500 million-plus active users log on in any given day. Twitter reports seeing 140 million tweets per day, up from 50 million a year ago, and creates 460,000 new accounts daily. According to the *comScore 2010 U.S. Digital Year in Review*, social networking sites accounted for 12% of all time spent online in 2010, and the average American spent more than 14 hours watching online videos in December, a 12% increase over the previous year.

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As social media continues to gain popularity in our culture, the workforce – and more specifically, the call center – is no exception. Many agents are comfortable with social learning in their personal lives and, as a result, more and more companies are adopting social and informal learning platforms at work.

Agents benefit from social learning because it offers an alternative way to learn, while companies benefit from the collaborative nature of the medium. Through social platforms, employees can share their knowledge, skills and experience with their peers, making the workforce as a whole more collaborative.

The result is a more informed and productive agent population, better overall customer service, and an improved company culture. All of that

sounds good, but – as with other off-phone activities in the call center – where do you find the time?

### What *is* Social Learning?

*Social learning* describes learning that occurs in the social context. In other words, people learning from other people.

Research shows that individuals are more likely to engage in certain behaviors when they believe they will be successful. In the contact center, for example, agents can learn from the successes and failures of those who know their business best – their fellow agents. In most cases, this provides a faster, more efficient way to teach new behaviors.

In addition to the immediate training benefit, social learning platforms provide a shared information bank rich with knowledge, skills and experience that ultimately elevates the level of expertise of the entire workforce.

A recent study by the Aberdeen Group entitled *Workforce Collaboration and Web 2.0 – Improving Productivity by Facilitating Knowledge Transfer* found that the onset of web 2.0 software tools – together with the need to improve productivity and capture institutional knowledge before it leaves the organization – is forcing organizations to take a serious look at collaborative tools.

Based on the more than 270 organizations interviewed for the study, collaboration has had a significant impact. The study showed that collaboration in best-in-class organizations improved new employee time to productivity on average by 19%, and decreased training cost per employee on average by 14%. Additionally, some

69% of companies surveyed allow workers to submit new content into a shared knowledge base.

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“Everyone uses Google to learn today,” said Jody Petruzzello, vice president of products for Mzinga® ([www.mzinga.com](http://www.mzinga.com)), a leading provider of social intelligence solutions, services and analytics for business. Mzinga’s flagship social software suite, OmniSocial®, enables organizations to drive improved employee engagement and productivity through comprehensive social learning, as well as customer loyalty and retention via end-to-end collaborative customer experience solutions.

“In many cases, social learning is more effective than traditional methods because users drive the content day to day. Just like asking your cube mate a question – now you can do it online. This helps people find new subject matter expertise on demand and gives them the ability to share their knowledge and insights,” said Petruzzello.

## Social Learning in the Call Center

In the call center, agents gain a lot of their knowledge and understanding through the social or informal learning process. Agents who handle similar call types can share insights and advice, enabling other agents to learn from their successes and mistakes.

According to a recent Knowlagent survey, some 2% of overall call center shrinkage is attributed to social and informal learning activities including knowledge base reviews, reading blogs or participating in online forums.

Social learning typically starts with a base learning management system and includes a host of applications to enhance that learning including the option to have social interactions around specific topics and the ability to rate and give feedback on the content itself. (In many cases, the social interactions that are created as a result actually become the learning material.)

Other social learning applications include blogs from different subject matter experts (SME), discussion boards, Wikis, free form and moderated chat, integrations with social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and other content associated with traditional learning.

Two percent of overall shrinkage is contributed to social and informal learning activities

“This is how consumers consume information today,” said Petruzzello. “More and more companies are using social learning to engage employees and provide ongoing support. It’s a mechanism for putting questions out there, peer-to-peer, so employees can network with one another online.”

Many social learning platforms also provide the ability to rate and review content, creating a quick, streamlined feedback cycle that increases traction

of the content for users, while giving managers and supervisors insight into which content is most effective.

“Not only does this drive better content, but an internal feedback loop also helps employees feel more valued, which ultimately improves employee retention because employees feel they have a voice and are being heard,” said Petruzzello.

## Finding Time for Social Learning

Call center agents are perfect candidates for social learning because it can occur right at the agent’s desktop – the key is finding time for agents to focus.

Recent research suggests that as much as 16 hours per month already exists. The issue is that the time occurs in fragments, on average as 2.5 minute segments. Technology can identify these small pockets of idle time between calls and direct agents to the corresponding system – including any social learning application – to complete assigned activities. Once these fragments of time are “found,” they can be aggregated together in 10-20 minute intervals so that agents can complete meaningful activities and make more productive use of their idle time without negatively effecting service levels.

Supervisors and operations managers should prioritize assigned activities on two levels – by *activity type* and by specific *task* – to ensure agents focus on the most important activities first, whether that’s social learning or must reads.

Because agents can complete bundled tasks during natural idle times between calls, large

blocks of time are not required to be scheduled off the phones for them to complete this work, which would require additional agents to cover the floor.

Knowlagent’s RightTime™ technology turns unproductive idle time into Active Wait Time to complete shrinkage activities, like social learning, and improve agent productivity simultaneously. Agents are free to share information and learn from one another – all without ever having to leave their chairs.

## About Knowlagent

Knowlagent provides the only call center software that increases agent utilization by delivering shrinkage activities during idle time. Knowlagent creates active wait time through dynamically delivered sessions for common shrinkage activities between customer interactions.

Knowlagent’s solutions are on-demand, easy to use and require no capital expenditures. Over 300,000 agents and managers around the world use Knowlagent’s solutions every day. For more information, call 888-566-9457 or visit us online at [www.knowlagent.com](http://www.knowlagent.com).

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