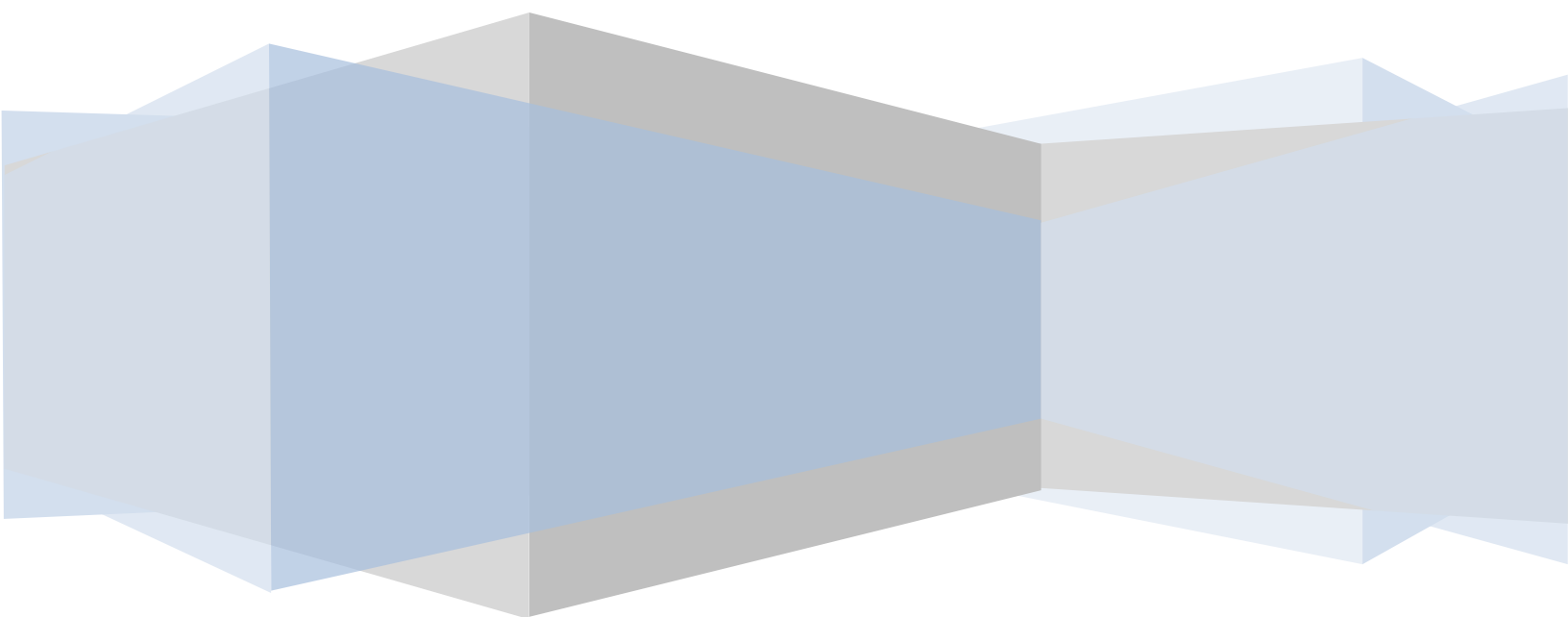


Customer Service at the Public Information Office, US Copyright Office

Office of Policy and Analysis
Smithsonian Institution

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Contents

Preface..... iv

List of Acronyms..... v

Executive Summary vi

 Conclusions vi

 How Well PIO Serves Its Customers..... vi

 The Quality of Quality Assurance at PIOviii

 Recommendations x

 Senior CO Management x

 IR&Dxi

 PIO.....xi

About the Study 1

 Purpose and Scope..... 1

 Methodology2

 Organization of the Report4

Conclusions.....6

 How Well PIO Serves Its Customers.....6

 The Quality of Quality Assurance at PIO 11

 Training..... 13

 Supervision..... 13

 Performance Evaluation..... 14

 Customer Feedback System..... 15

 Technology 15

Recommendations..... 17

 Senior CO Management 17

 IR&D..... 18

 PIO 18

 Quality Assurance..... 18

 Productivity..... 20

Public Information Office Background 21

 Operating Environment 21

Technology	21
Migration from GroupWise to Outlook	22
CO Website.....	22
Role of the Public Information Office.....	24
Nature and Volume of PIO Operations.....	25
Telephone calls.....	26
Emails.....	28
Walk-in customers.....	28
PIO Staff Structure	29
Interoffice Relations.....	30
Findings: Quality of Customer Service.....	34
What Customers Said	34
Interviewees	34
Survey Responses.....	35
What PIO Staff Said.....	41
What the OP&A Study Team Found.....	42
Telephone Calls	43
Emails.....	45
Walk-ins	46
Findings: Quality Assurance at PIO	47
Training.....	47
Supervision.....	50
Performance Evaluation	51
Job Satisfaction	53
Findings: Best Practices for Contact Centers.....	55
Appendix A. Public Information Office Customer Service Rating Instrument	58
Appendix B. Selected Best Practices from the Literature Review, US Patent and Trademark Office Contact Centers, and Convergys.....	62
Best Practices in Contact Centers from the Literature.....	62
Leadership	62
Culture and Values.....	62
Goals.....	63

Contact Center Metrics.....	63
Customer-focused.	63
Operational.....	64
Technology	64
Process.....	66
Human Resources.....	67
Supervision.....	67
Monitoring.....	68
Behavioral expectations.....	69
Customer Feedback.....	71
Highlights from the US Patent and Trademark Office Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance Center and from Convergys.....	72
US Patent and Trademark Office Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance Center	72
Convergys.....	76
Appendix C. Pilot Customer Feedback Survey Instrument.....	80
Appendix D. Bibliography of Literature Reviewed for Contact Center Best Practices.....	88

Preface

Elizabeth R. Scheffler, Chief of Operations, Copyright Office of the Library of Congress, requested that the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) assess the quality of customer service in two Sections of the Information and Records Division (I&RD), the Public Information Office and the Records Research & Certification Section. The objective of the study was to provide recommendations to improve customer service in both Sections.

OP&A staff Whitney Watriss, David Karns, Lance Costello, and Jarrid Green designed and conducted this study. They benefited greatly from the contributions of three capable interns, Eddiemae Nash, Grace Hart, and Damaris Altomerianos, who helped with the interviews, observations, and analysis. Many OP&A staff and interns assisted with transcription and mystery shopping: Kathleen Ernst, Sarah Block, Claire Eckert, Renae Youngs, Alexis VanZalen, Maurice Johnson, Caryn Carlson Rothe, Megan Lee, and Givi Khidesheli. I very much appreciate their help on this project.

I thank all the interviewees who participated in this study. They helped the researchers to develop, expand, and refine the information.

Finally, I am grateful to Elizabeth Scheffler for asking OP&A to undertake this study and for helping us better understand the tasks I&RD carries out. Being able to meet customer expectations is a complex undertaking. The Copyright Office's clear dedication to this endeavor is in the best interests of the public.

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List of Acronyms

CO	US Copyright Office, Library of Congress
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CTO	Copyright Technology Office, Copyright Office
FCR	First-call resolution
IAC	Inventors Assistance Center, US Patent and Trademark Office
ITS	Information Technology Services, Library of Congress
IVR	Interactive voice response
I&RD	Information and Records Division, Copyright Office
OP&A	Office of Policy and Analysis, Smithsonian Institution
PIO	Public Information Office, Information and Records Division, Copyright Office
RAC	Receipt Analysis & Control Division
RMS	Records Management Section, Copyright Office
RR&C	Records, Research & Certification Section, Information and Records Division, Copyright Office
RRP	Registration & Recordation Program, Copyright Office
TAC	Trademark Assistance Center, US Patent and Trademark Office
USPTO	US Patent and Trademark Office

Executive Summary

The US Copyright Office (CO) believes that high-quality service is important for its customers and, further, that it fosters and supports the creativity of Americans and thereby contributes to the creation of jobs and economic returns. The Information and Records Division (I&RD) has primary responsibility for providing information and assistance to CO customers. The Chief Operating Officer of CO contracted with the Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to assess how two I&RD Sections, the Public Information Office (PIO) and Records, Research & Certification (RR&C), might improve customer service. This report addresses customer service at PIO.

The OP&A study team collected data from several sources. It observed and evaluated customer interactions with PIO by telephone, email, and in-person, using a rating instrument widely used in industry, as well as the experience of OP&A “mystery shoppers.” The study team interviewed CO senior managers, PIO staff, a diverse group of PIO customers, staff in CO offices with which PIO interacts regularly; and representatives of three leading contact center organizations—the Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and Convergys. The study team also looked at tracking data from the I&RD performance reports database and from the OpinionLab CO website satisfaction survey and the literature on contact center best practices. An online survey provided additional customer feedback.

Conclusions

How Well PIO Serves Its Customers

For the most part, PIO serves its customers professionally and respectfully. Most customers said that overall they were well satisfied with the treatment they receive and the responses to their questions. At the same time, the quality of service was not consistent across all interactions and information specialists, and sometimes the quality of the interaction was inferior. The study team concluded that PIO has a quality assurance problem and saw opportunities for improvement relative to contact center best practices. In order of importance, aspects of customer service that merit attention are as follows.

- **Accuracy of the information provided.** Responses provided by PIO specialists were not always accurate. This problem is best addressed with systematic monitoring of all information specialists, followed by feedback and refresher training as needed, and a review of PIO’s pattern paragraphs and other substantive

informational material. Optimally, CO legal staff would participate in this effort. Similarly, information provided by other CO offices and the website sometimes contained inaccuracies. Customer service would benefit from better guidelines and monitoring of which Section or office should answer what types of questions and be provided the requisite training.

- **Completeness of the information provided.** Complete information means that the information specialists fully understand and answer a customer's query, including providing information the customer did not know to ask for, and alert the customer to the benefits of the CO website. There was considerable disparity in the extent to which different specialists fully understood and answered questions fully. Part of the reason is likely that specialists do not have clear guidance on what constitutes a complete response and have a performance standard of completing calls within three minutes, which conflicts with completeness. Completeness is also critical to a high priority best practice for contact centers—first-call resolution (FCR)—meaning the customer gets enough information that subsequent contact on the same matter is not necessary. Implementing FCR requires an unrestricted call duration, a capability to track a call, including transfers, to its end, and a capability to track whether customers contact the center again on the same matter.
- **Time aspects of responses to telephone calls and emails.** When viewed against PIO's average call handle, the standard of 3 minute calls seems unrealistic even for some basic queries such as status updates. The study team argues for PIO moving to an unrestricted call duration. With respect to another aspect of time—how long a customer has to wait before reaching a specialist—PIO's average wait time exceeds best practice for commercial firms. However, the study team cannot say definitively that PIO should bring its wait time down. Few customers complained about wait times and seemed willing to wait as long as they came away with the information they wanted. Further, factors such as a reduction in the registration claim processing backlog and faster processing times may reduce the volume of calls in the relatively near future, which could bring wait times down. The study team also believes there is inefficiency within PIO because of extended breaks, absenteeism, and slack time during work hours. Last, the proposed addition of two technical assistants, which the study team strongly endorses, combined with a telephone tree option to route routine calls to those staff, will likely free up time of the information specialists. Reassigning some queries to more appropriate offices, such as status updates, claim examination issues, and technical assistance on eCO and the website, would also help. Until such measures are tried, the study team cannot endorse hiring more information specialists as a way to solve wait times.

With respect to emails, the study team agrees with customers who thought the five-day response time is excessive. The study team did not hear a compelling argument for why it could not be reduced to 2 business days.

Given the possibility that some people are getting busy signals when the phone queue reaches 12, the study team thinks that PIO might want to move to an open-ended queue, as do other contact centers.

- **Empathy**, defined as professionalism, respect, patience, valuing of customers, and a friendly tone. The OP&A study team was troubled by the considerable variability in how the information specialists interacted with customers. Customers should be able to expect a base level of professionalism from every information specialist. Measures that can improve empathy across specialists include clear guidelines for professional behavior, regular monitoring, feedback, and coaching, and an unrestricted call duration. A professional call response would include at least: a greeting with a friendly salutation, the name of the office and specialist, and an offer to assist the customer; provision of complete information; reference to the CO website; and a closing that leaves the customer feeling satisfied and important to the agent and CO.

CO needs a customer service quality standard that applies across CO as a whole—no matter where customers go in CO, they should be able to reach a live person and get accurate, complete, timely, and professional service. Such a customer-centric focus is facilitated by a high-end Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that maintains a full record of customer contacts such that repeat calls on the same question can be identified, that provides agents with a full history of a customer’s interaction with CO each time they call, and that links seamlessly with the current Siebel application.

The Quality of Quality Assurance at PIO

Many of the above problems relate to the absence of a robust quality assurance system within PIO and of a systematic method for ascertaining customer satisfaction. Before looking at specific elements of quality assurance at PIO, some general comments are in order. First, quality assurance is only as good as leadership wants it to be and holds staff accountable for. Second, ironically, the customer service ethic in PIO of being available to customers above all else may undermine service quality. It seems to eliminate any time for other aspects of operations essential to maintaining quality, such as training and monitoring. Third, because PIO has a captive audience and most customers are adequately satisfied, CO could choose not to invest further in quality assurance. The study team would argue that government agencies are obligated to serve their customers to the best of their ability, although within reasonable limits relative to other demands for resources.

Fourth, and most important, strong management of PIO will produce the most improvement in the quality of its customer service.

Training. The study team noted that PIO did not have a training manual and plan for new hires and longer term staff. It strongly suspected that PIO was not making adequate time available for training or include this activity in the position descriptions of trainers. In contrast, training saw training as a means for improvement and advancement.

Supervision. Regular supervision is an axiom of good management, and monitoring is a foremost tool of supervision and quality control. Fundamental to good supervision are clear standards against which to monitor performance and offer feedback. PIO suffers from a lack of supervision, although many information specialists clearly valued monitoring and feedback. Moreover, their absence deprived staff of the opportunity to bring their work up to a higher standard and achieve a higher performance rating in their annual performance evaluation. A rigorous system of regular supervision, particularly systematic monitoring, would benefit PIO greatly. A first step is to define performance expectations and standards, and offer related training. Next is a plan and schedule for when and how to monitor staff and offer feedback. Also essential is that PIO supervisors have and take the time to carry out their responsibility, particularly monitoring and feedback.

Performance Evaluation. PIO has a dysfunctional performance evaluation process. Performance expectations and standards are lacking or unclear. Evaluations do not contribute to professional development or job satisfaction. Absent monitoring, there is a question about the basis for staff performance ratings. At the very least, PIO needs clear expectations and standards consistent with actual work performed and best practices for contact centers; clear metrics for achieving specific performance ratings; guidance on what needs to be improved and a plan for providing training and other resources to that end; and sanctions and rewards commensurate with the performance rating.

Customer Feedback System. Customer feedback is a key part of a good quality assurance system. A PIO customer survey, either via interactive voice response (IVR) or online, is a viable part of measuring customer satisfaction. Optimally, the survey contains only a small number of questions, which include a rating for overall satisfaction and for the accuracy and reliability of the information and services received. The resulting data can be used to set baseline metrics as performance standards.

Technology. The study team came away with the impression that I&RD—and CO more generally—are not taking full advantage of the functionalities and features of existing technology or planned upgrades to support quality customer service. Nor did customer service seem to be a priority in technology planning or the operations of the Copyright Technology Office (CTO) and Information Technology Services (ITS). It seemed to the

study team that interviewees viewed ITS and, to a lesser degree, CTO as unsupportive of customer service. The study team is concerned that the key parties interacting directly with customers or support quality customer service, including CTO and ITS, are not functioning as a team.

CO would benefit from a technology plan that has customer service as a core element. It will want to explore the type of sophisticated CRM system employed at the US Patent and Trademark Office's Trademark Assistance Center. But the study team believes major technology decisions are best left until non-technology upgrades are in place and their impact is determined. Instead, in the interim I&RD might focus on easily activated functions currently available through existing technology or planned upgrades.

Recommendations

Senior CO Management

- Develop a CO-wide vision and guidance for superior customer service that make leadership's commitment and expectations clear, define a standard of excellence, and establish a culture of accountability for results.
- Define the roles of the different divisions and sections of CO in responding to customers' requests for service, and ensure employees have the training and resources to carry out those roles.
- Provide guidance on quality standards for customer service that CO offices should follow in developing their own performance standards and expectations, so that customers receive the same quality of service no matter where they go in CO. Customer service guidance should address at least: timely access to a live agent; accurate and complete responses to queries; first-call/email resolution where possible and, if a service request is transferred, notification of the customer to whom the request is being sent; monitoring of transfers and responses to make sure they are completed within a reasonable period of time; and professional, courteous treatment of customers.
- Establish a team approach to the provision of quality customer service that involves all staff who interact with customers or support the offices that do so—the contact centers, legal offices, technology and IT support offices, RRP, and senior management.
- Implement a specialized response system for dealing with customer inquiries and service requests based on their focus: eCO and other technology-related issues to

CTO; status update questions to the Receipt Analysis & Control Division (RAC); examination-related questions to the RRP divisions; records-related questions to RR&C; and general information and problem resolution to PIO.

- Define and implement a technology plan that supports implementation of exemplary customer service and quality assurance.
- Adopt a customer-centric focus built around a comprehensive CRM that encompasses the records in the current Siebel CRM, but adds a CRM capacity for tracking and maintaining records on all customer interactions with CO. At a minimum, the system should maintain a record of all customer contacts with every CO division/office/section; track customer interactions that require follow-up, identifying when, how, and by whom follow-up was to occur and what happened; initiate customer satisfaction surveys online or via IVR after each transaction; and produce regular reports of the state of customer service throughout CO, including levels of satisfaction, the number of open service requests by CO division, and statistics on the flow of work by division.

IR&D

- Develop a plan for implementing the CO-wide vision for superior customer service with respect to PIO and RR&C, and facilitate improved interaction with other offices.
- Ensure that PIO is managed to optimize customer service and assure quality.
- Establish and implement a robust quality assurance system within I&RD.
- Implement a reporting system for customer service that supports quality assurance.

PIO

Quality assurance.

- Establish and implement a robust quality assurance system.
 - Define clear standards and expectations for the elements of superior customer service and professional behavior, to include:
 - Accurate and complete information, the latter defined as anticipating and providing information that will be of value to the customer in making decisions and eliminate the need for further contact on the same matter.

- Timely response to requests for service, including first-call/email resolution.
 - Interactions with customers that include: a greeting that opens with a friendly salutation (such as good morning), the name of the office and agent's name, and an offer to assist the customer; a request for a name, telephone number, and/or email address in case the call gets disconnected; referrals to the CO website and information on its use; and a closing that leaves the customer feeling that the PIO information specialist was genuinely pleased to have been of help and that the customer was important to both the agent and CO.
- Establish baseline metrics for each element of a customer interaction, based on customer feedback (see below), productivity data, and internal assessments of customer service, and develop a performance measurement plan, including:
 - Minimizing queue waits.
 - Providing wait times to callers in the queue
 - Offering an open-ended queue
 - Moving to an open-ended call duration standard
 - Establishing a 2-3 business day turnaround for responding to emails.
- Implement a formal training program that addresses new hire, refresher, and professional development training, supported by a training manual and plan and scheduled time for staff participation.
- Supervise staff on a regular basis.
 - Establish a standard for the percentage of a supervisor's time to be spent on that responsibility.
 - Conduct periodic formal and informal monitoring, feedback, and follow-up coaching and training, linked to the annual performance evaluation process.
 - Conduct periodic mystery shopping to ensure superior customer service.

- Work with CO's legal staff to include their expertise in refresher training and monitoring of staff responses to assess accuracy and adherence to the boundary between information delivery and advice.
- Review, update, and augment all materials utilized by agents to respond to customers and by management for quality assurance to ensure they are up to date and accurate.
- Implement an effective performance evaluation process that
 - Is based on clear, measurable performance standards and expectations for the information specialist and technical assistance positions.
 - Offers a transparent rating system.
 - Delivers an explanation to staff of how their rating was determined, guidance on what they need to do to achieve a higher rating, and a plan of action for improving performance.
 - Has a transparent incentives program that is clearly tied to performance.
- Implement a system for collecting customer feedback to track satisfaction.
 - Survey customers, either via IVR or online, asking a small number of questions that should include ratings for overall satisfaction and the accuracy and reliability of the information and services received.
 - Offer the survey following every customer interaction.
 - Periodically supplement the ongoing survey with longer, in-depth studies of customer satisfaction.
- Ensure that time is made available to implement and participate in quality assurance.

Productivity.

- Explore the benefits and costs of a tiered staffing structure within PIO, with tier 1 handling general, non-specialized calls and tier 2 handling calls requiring in-depth expertise.

About the Study

Purpose and Scope

Within the US Copyright Office (CO), the Information and Records Division (I&RD) is responsible for providing information and customer service through the CO website and interaction with CO information staff. Sections within I&RD handle the bulk of the interactions with clients. Such interactions include:

- Responding to requests for general copyright information;
- Providing information on copyright registration claim procedures;
- Assisting in resolving problems with claims for copyright registration;
- Producing and distributing CO forms and publications;
- Handling requests for records-related services, such as document searches, certification of copies, and inspection of registered copyrighted works;
- Maintaining the CO website; and
- Storing, preserving, and providing access to copies of registered copyrighted works (called deposit copies) and related correspondence.

Four I&RD Sections provide these services: Copyright Information (more commonly known as the Public Information Office, PIO); Records, Research & Certification (RR&C); Records Management (RMS); and Publications. RMS receives, maintains, and preserves records of registrations and recordations. The Publications Section maintains and fills requests for CO forms and information, as well as CO publications and notices. PIO is discussed in detail in this report, while RR&C, which assists the public in finding and obtaining copies of registered copyrighted material and related records, is the subject of a separate report.¹

In the spring of 2010 the Chief Operating Officer of the Copyright Office contracted with the Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to assess the quality of customer service at PIO and RR&C and to provide recommendations for improving customer service in both Sections, thereby furthering Output 2 of the Copyright Office's Public Services strategic goal, "Improved ability of users and owners to engage in mutually beneficial copyright transactions."

¹ Copyright Office, Library of Congress "Customer Service at the Records, Research & Certification Section, US Copyright Office," Office of Policy and Analysis, Smithsonian Institution, September 2010.

While the Copyright Office has a captive market, in that it is the only place at which to register copyrights and get access to records relating to registered copyrights, it is still committed to providing a quality customer experience. That is its obligation as a federal agency, but more important is that by fostering and supporting the creativity of Americans, CO is contributing to the creation of jobs and economic returns.

Methodology

The scope of the study called for data collection from several sources:

- Observation and evaluation of customer interaction with PIO information specialists through three modes of contact:
 - *Reviewing telephone calls and rating the information specialist-customer interaction.* The OP&A study team recorded customer calls coming into PIO in different two-hour segments during the week of July 12, 2010. At least two team members reviewed and rated 61 calls. In the case of a conflict between the ratings of the two reviewers, a third person listened to the call and served as tiebreaker. To achieve as much consistency as possible in how the different reviewers rated the calls, the study team developed a rating instrument based on the RATER² scale, which is widely used in industry (Appendix A). The study team adapted the rating instrument to be consistent with what it learned about performance expectations for PIO information specialists. That is, it assessed interactions with customers against PIO standards and expectations, and not against best practices for contact centers.³ The RATER instrument looked at five aspects of customer service—*Responsiveness* (whether the agent addressed the customer’s questions); *Assurance* (whether the agent answered all questions sufficiently so that the customer knew what steps to take next and likely would not need to call back); *Tangibles* (the agent’s response was easy to understand); *Empathy* (the agent’s response was professional and courteous); and *Reliability* (the customer came away feeling that the information provided

² Five RATER dimensions were identified by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), based on research that measured ten aspects of service reliability. Also see Zemke (2003).

³ “A contact center (also referred to as a *customer interaction center* or *e-contact center*) is a central point in an enterprise from which all customer contacts are managed. The contact center typically includes one or more online call centers but may include other types of customer contact as well, including email newsletters, postal mail catalogs, website inquiries and chats, and the collection of information from customers during in-store purchasing. A contact center is generally part of an enterprise’s overall customer relationship management.” <http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/definition/contact-center>. Accessed August 30, 2010. PIO, CO’s contact center, serves as the public face of CO and interacts with customers via multiple modes—telephone, electronic channels such as email, walk-in customers, and postal mail.

was accurate). OP&A reviewers noted the customer's tone, for example, whether the customer seemed angry or confused. The final step after rating each element of the interaction was to assign an overall rating.

- *Review and rating of email responses to customer inquiries.* The study team reviewed and rated 159 emails sent out by PIO between June 3 and June 29, again using the RATER instrument and following the same procedures as described above for telephone calls. However, it also looked at the timeliness of PIO responses.
- *Monitoring interactions with walk-in customers.* A study team member sat near the reception desks of PIO and observed exchanges between customers and information specialists, rating them using the RATER instrument. In this case, only one team member gave a rating.
- “Mystery shopping,” which involved OP&A staff and interns interacting by telephone with PIO information specialists using prepared service request scenarios. The scenarios were reviewed by the PIO Section Head, who also provided the correct responses against which to measure the performance of the information specialists. As is discussed later, the study team decided to focus the mystery shopping on telephone calls because there seemed to be more problems with this mode of interaction than with the others.
- Interviews with
 - The Copyright Office Chief Operating Officer, senior managers of I&RD, and 10 of 14 PIO staff who agreed to be interviewed.
 - External customers. These included 47 individuals who requested services of either or both PIO and RR&C, of whom 11 were frequent users of PIO services, such as lawyers; and a representative of the US Department of Justice.
 - Current and former staff of CO offices with which PIO interacts regularly: Office of the General Counsel; Associate Register for Policy and International Affairs; Registration & Recordation Program (RRP); and Copyright Technology Office (CTO); and representatives of the Library of Congress Information Technology Services (ITS).
 - Two organizations that are considered leaders in the field of contact centers—the Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), which supports the Inventors Assistance Center (IAC) and Trademark Assistance Center (TAC)—

and a private-sector firm, Convergys, that provides contact center services for federal agencies and other organizations under contract (see Appendix B for the highlights of best practices at these three organizations). These three organizations were selected because of their reputations for superior customer service and the similarity of their services with those offered by PIO and RR&C.

- An online survey to gain additional customer feedback, to provide a basis for establishing baseline customer satisfaction indexes for patrons of PIO and RR&C and to test a customer feedback instrument that I&RD could use on an ongoing basis (Appendix C). The survey covered four modes of contact with PIO—telephone, email, postal mail, and walk-in customers. Information specialists in PIO and RR&C were to ask telephone and walk-in customers to participate in a customer satisfaction survey by accessing a URL that would take them to the survey questions; customers communicating with PIO by email received a return email with the URL link.
- A review of secondary literature on contact center best practices (see Appendix D for the bibliography).
- A review of statistical tracking data from the I&RD performance reports database that includes wait times in a queue, number and timing of abandoned calls, and duration of calls following pick-up by an information specialist.
- A review of data collected by CO via the OpinionLab’s web survey.

Data collection took place between April 14, 2010 and August 30, 2010. The study team analyzed the data, generated conclusions and recommendations, and prepared this report.

Organization of the Report

The next section presents the OP&A study team’s conclusions about the quality of customer service and quality assurance in PIO, followed by recommendations for improving both. The findings sections follow. The first provides background information on PIO, including the operating environment within CO that affects the volume of PIO service requests and PIO operations relating to customer service. The second looks at what customers and PIO staff said about the quality of customer service in PIO and what the OP&A study team found. The third addresses how PIO handles quality assurance. The appendices contain: a copy of the customer service rating instrument (Appendix A); a compilation of key best practices to emerge from the literature review on contact centers and meetings with the US Patent and Trademark Office’s Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance

Center and with Convergys (B); a copy of the survey instrument (Appendix C); and a bibliography of the literature reviewed on best practices for contact centers (Appendix D).

Conclusions

How Well PIO Serves Its Customers

The OP&A study team believes that, for the most part, customers are served professionally and respectfully. PIO has some exceptionally good information specialists who listen well and provide responsive answers, are very empathic, and try to anticipate and answer questions the customer might have down the road. They do not appear rushed or abrupt, but instead make the caller feel as if he or she is a valuable customer. They take seriously the role of PIO as the public face of CO and their obligation to provide superior customer service. As a result, most customers said that overall they were well satisfied with the treatment they receive and the responses to their questions. Interestingly, many customers were able to distinguish between problems of PIO's making, and those pertaining to CO more broadly and to the nature of federal agencies.

At the same time, the study team did not find the quality of service to be consistent across all interactions and information specialists, some of whom are not serving their customers well. The study team found enough instances of this in the relatively small sample of interactions it reviewed to conclude that PIO has a quality assurance problem. The study team wonders, given its lack of deep expertise on copyright-related matters, whether there were more instances of inaccurate or incomplete information than it picked up. For the same reason, although customers on the whole felt assured about the information they received, the study team cautions against relying only on this feedback, because infrequent users of PIO services likely also do not know when a response is inadequate. Last, when the OP&A study team looks at PIO operations from the perspective of best practices for contact centers, as presented in the literature and in evidence at the Patent and Trademark Office's Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance Center and at Convergys, it finds areas of possible improvement at PIO.

Specific aspects of customer service at PIO the study team believes merit improvement are as follows. They are placed in what the study team believes is their order of importance in terms of the potential impact of poor performance.

- **Accuracy of the information provided.** Based on the size of the sample of interactions the study team reviewed and its level of expertise, the study team cannot reliably quantify to what extent inaccurate information is given out. However, it would set a very high standard for correct responses, since accurate information is the core service CO provides. Disrespect is unpleasant, an incomplete answer troublesome, but incorrect information can have far more serious repercussions. The errors detected by the study team of necessity involved

relatively basic questions and information, and that is cause for concern. Staff should not be making errors at that level. This issue of inaccurate responses is best addressed with systematic monitoring of all information specialists, followed by feedback and refresher training as needed.

The study team agrees with the suggestion that PIO and the legal staff engage in a review of PIO's pattern paragraphs and other substantive informational material. In fact, it is important, consistent with best practice, that PIO, IR&D, and other offices as appropriate periodically review all materials critical to assuring the delivery of accurate information to customers. This would include informational material on the website, PIO training manuals, and quality standards and expectations.

As noted in the findings, the matter of inaccurate information is not just a PIO issue, but one that applies to CO more broadly—it happens on the website⁴, and it occurs when offices such as RR&C give out information on matters for which they haven't been trained. The study team agrees with interviewees who call for greater transparency in information, and for better guidelines and monitoring of which Section or office should answer what types of questions and when it is appropriate to transfer a call. While the study team understands the desire of CO contact centers to provide customers a one-stop shop, it is a disservice to them if it means incorrect information. Thus, if other offices like RR&C are to answer basic questions, it is important that they receive the same training as PIO and are monitored to assure quality.

- **Completeness of the information provided.** The study team defined complete information to mean that, where advisable, the specialist asked for additional information to completely understand a customer's query(ies) and then fully answered the query; provided additional relevant information that the customer did not know to ask; and referred the customer to the website as a preferable source of information for the future, taking time to discuss its navigation as necessary. Based on that standard, there was considerable disparity in whether specialists fully understood and answered the question(s) asked, chose to go beyond the basic query itself to provide additional needed information, and referred customers to the website for additional information. Disparity may occur in part because PIO provides no clear guidance on what it means by complete and proactive responses

⁴ For example, at one place in Circular 4, "Copyright Office Fees," the hourly search fee is \$165, whereas at another place it is \$165 per hour with a two-hour minimum, making the minimum fee \$330. The "Frequently Asked Questions" site states that "ninety percent of Form CO filers should receive a certificate within eight months of submission" and 90% of paper form filers "within eighteen months of submission." Information at <http://www.copyright.gov/register/index.html> states that "Ninety percent of Form CO filers should receive a certificate within eight months of submission" and "Ninety percent of paper filers should receive a certificate within eighteen months of submission."

and because of the 3-minute call duration standard. In the study team's opinion, the 3-minute call duration standard clearly conflicts with a broad definition of completeness.

Also part of the completeness of an answer is first-call resolution (FCR), meaning that the customer receives enough information before hanging up (transfers are included as part of the first call if they don't involve a hanging-up) and therefore a repeat call will not be necessary. The literature on best practices talks a great deal about the importance of FCR, rating it as a very high-priority goal of contact centers. The study team never heard anyone use this term or emphasize this best practice beyond a general statement that PIO should be a one-stop shop. FCR has been widely adopted as a best practice because it not only serves customers well, but it results in significant cost-savings by heading off repeat calls. The OP&A team believes CO would benefit from this practice. Implementing it will require a much longer or unrestricted call duration standard, a capability to track a call to its end, including any transfers, and a capability to track customers over time to see if they call back for something related to an earlier call (see the discussion on Customer Relationship Management [CRM] systems below).

- **Time aspects of responses to telephone calls and emails.** With respect to that standard of 3 minutes for the call, the study team believes it is a disservice to customers, for several reasons. The Inventors Assistance Center, which handles queries as complex if not more so than PIO no longer has a time limit for calls, believing that providing a complete response and taking the time to ensure the customer understands it is the most important service for customers. Even with an open-ended timeframe, it finds that the average call runs only 5-7 minutes. PIO's 3-minute standard appears to be affecting how politely and professionally staff interact with customers and to contribute to incomplete or unresponsive answers. The literature shows that significant cost savings result from FCR, which is hard to achieve without affording specialists the time to provide complete answers, on which customers place a very high value. When viewed against PIO's average call handle, the standard seems unrealistic even for some basic-type calls such as status updates, although the Siebel upgrade may bring the average time for those calls down. The study team argues for moving to an unrestricted duration standard.

The average wait time in the queue before reaching an information specialist came up frequently. The actual average wait time exceeds best practice for commercial firms, according to the Convergys interviewee, who said that the goal is to answer 80% of calls within 30 seconds. At the one minute mark, people start hanging up. On the other hand, customers who have questions on things like healthcare will wait

far longer. In the end, the study team decided that it could not say definitively that PIO should bring its wait time down, even though customers would appreciate it, for a number of reasons. There were not a lot of customer complaints; people on the whole seemed to accept the wait as fairly standard for government agencies, and were all right with it so long as they were able to reach an information specialist and to resolve their query satisfactorily. Several things are expected to bring the volume of calls down in the relatively near future, and that in turn could also bring wait times down. The backlog in processing registration claims is now decreasing. That, and improvements to the user-friendliness of the website and of eCO, will probably reduce PIO's call volume. Similarly, a reduction in the delays in processing registration claims and a further increase in online registration claims could have the same effect. An in-depth study of staff productivity was outside the scope of this study, but based on staff comments and the study team's own observations, there is reason to believe that there is some level of inefficiency because of extended breaks, absenteeism, and slack time during work hours. Last, the proposed addition of two technical assistants, which the study team strongly endorses, combined with a telephone tree option that routes routine calls such as status updates to those staff, will likely free up time of the information specialists to handle more substantive calls. A final type of call that is time-consuming for PIO specialists and that probably does not belong with PIO is technical assistance for navigating eCO and the website.

If I&RD decides it is important to bring wait times down, one measure might be to reassign some tasks that are not really information-related, such as status updates and receipt of completed applications, out of PIO, and to have RRP become more engaged with answering customer questions that properly fall in its domain. It is better placed to answer calls related to its examination of applications, and it does not make sense to the study team that some RRP divisions are able to field calls from PIO and others not.⁵ The study team did not assess the capacity of CTO to handle more technical calls, but that might be another option to free up information specialists in PIO. Of course, the information specialists would have to get on board with transferring all those calls, and not process some of them as happens now.

One obvious way to bring wait times down is to hire more information specialists, a step that a number of interviewees suggested. Until other measures are tried and the actual productivity of PIO staff is assessed to see if there is unused capacity, the study team cannot opine on this approach.

⁵ Here, as in the previous study OP&A did of the CO's Receipt Analysis & Control Division's operations, the study team came away with the sense the lack of standard procedures across all RRP divisions is making the work of other Sections and units more difficult and inefficient and likely contributes to errors. It believes that this issue merits review by CO.

With respect to emails, the study team agrees with those customers who thought the five-day response time is excessive. It is higher than that of other contact centers, and the study team was not made aware of a compelling argument why it could not be reduced to 2 business days.

Given the possibility that some people are getting busy signals when the phone queue reaches 12, the study team thinks that PIO might want to move to an open-ended queue, as other contact centers have.

- **Empathy**, defined as professionalism, respect, patience, valuing of customers, and a friendly tone. At the outset of this discussion, it is important to note that the study team believes the negative ratings for empathy might be more frequent in its review of PIO-customer interactions had it used a more rigorous standard (see the methodology), for example, had it rated against best practices. Even among the calls and emails the study team found it needed to rate as acceptable, it was troubled by the considerable variability in how the information specialists greeted customers, their tone of voice, their level of patience, their willingness to be responsive beyond the minimum answer, and how they ended the call. The study team believes that customers should be able to expect a certain base level of professionalism from every information specialist. Some might exceed that level, but none should fall below it.

As noted, a common theme across all sources of data was that some specialists came across as hurried, brusque, or impatient. The study team cannot definitively say if this was caused by the 3-minute call duration standard, the emphasis on answering as many phone calls as possible, the wrong mindset for customer service work, or a combination of these factors. It does, however, see an inherent conflict in the emphasis on quantity and providing quality customer service, particularly when specialists are told to give comprehensive responses and to take time to anticipate possible follow-up calls and provide additional information and to alert customers to the advantages of using the website as their first information resource.

Beyond adjusting the 3-minute standard, as discussed above, this issue with empathy is best addressed by setting clear guidelines for professional behavior and regular monitoring of specialists, followed by feedback and coaching as necessary. The study team would argue for at least the following as appropriate elements of a professional call response: a greeting that opens with a friendly salutation (such as good morning), provides the name of the office and the specialist, and ends by asking how to assist the customer; provision of information that addresses both the query and possible follow-on information that might also be helpful; a reference to the CO website and its use; and a closing that leaves the customer feeling like the

information specialist was genuinely pleased to be of help and that the customer was important to the agent and CO.

One area of customer interaction with PIO/CO about which the study team could not gather information is what happens when calls are transferred to another office, such as CTO or RRP. At present, PIO has no way to tell if the other office responded to the customers at all or within a reasonable amount of time, and if the customer received a satisfactory response. For CO to be truly a customer service-focused organization, it will need to require essentially the same standard of customer service in other offices that it requires of PIO—customers should be able to reach a live person and get accurate, complete, timely, and professional service no matter where they go in CO. At the very least, transfers need monitoring to ensure that customers are called back within a reasonable period of time and given good information. This may require adoption of a CO-wide customer-centric focus and implementation of a more high-end CRM system than it has now. A system that maintains a full record of all customer contacts, such that repeat calls on the same question can be identified and agents get a complete history of a customer's interaction with CO each time they answer a call, and that is seamlessly linked to the current Siebel application, would be a very significant advance in customer service at CO.

The Quality of Quality Assurance at PIO

The study team concludes that many of the problems discussed above relate to the absence of a robust quality assurance system within PIO, particularly with respect to certain key elements of such a system: training, especially ongoing follow-on training; supervision, including regular and formal monitoring and feedback; and performance evaluation. Addressing the weaknesses in these elements of quality assurance should in turn improve morale within PIO. In addition, and particularly compared with best practices in contact centers, PIO does not have a systematic method for ascertaining customer satisfaction. Last, I&RD—and CO more generally—does not seem to be making optimal use of the technology it has to support quality customer service. As the study team tried to ascertain what features Siebel 8.1, Avaya, and Outlook had that might support quality assurance and customer service, it got the impression that that assessment was not being conducted. When it went to interview the technology staff, it would get comments like “let me know what you find out, because that will be useful.” The study team also came away with the perception that the technology and IT offices weren't focused on or particularly attentive to customer service. It seemed as if the right hand was not talking to the left hand. However, the study team did not explore in detail if this perception is accurate.

Before looking at the specific elements of quality assurance, some general comments are in order. First, as the literature points out, quality assurance is only as good as leadership

wants it to be. If leadership does not signal its commitment to exemplary customer service, imbue the organizational culture with that value, plan systematically for the implementation of exemplary customer service, and hold all staff, including managers and supervisors, accountable for quality assurance, other staff will not take it as seriously as they should. On the matter of accountability, it was not clear whether management prepared routine reports of quantitative and qualitative metrics needed to determine the various aspects of the quality of customer service. The study team did review statistics on average telephone call wait and duration times and abandonment rates, but some of the data are limited in their potential for managing operations. For example, the “Split/Skill Call Profile Monthly Reports” show the distribution of calls by time interval—but only from start through 45 seconds. Thus, the April 1, 2010, report shows that of a total of 9,998 calls, only 892 were answered within 45 seconds. Likewise, of the 2,837 abandoned calls, 2,352 were abandoned after 45 seconds—but how much after 45 seconds? The average speed of answering was 5 minutes and the average abandonment time was 3:06. In other words, this report fails to show the distribution by time of the majority of calls, which is important information when setting standards and assessing information specialist performance. A senior manager told the study team that the intervals could be changed if such a request were made. As I&RD and PIO develop a set of performance expectations and standards, it likely will need to define which data and reports will be needed to assess quality. Fortunately, it has a robust database to mine. In the same fashion, the study team is not aware if general “dash board” reports are produced for I&RD and CO management to show the current, prior, and projected status of PIO.

Second, after observing PIO operations, the study team concludes that the customer service ethic of being available to customers above all else ironically may in fact be undermining service quality. The very strong focus on keeping the phones and front desk staffed at all times has essentially cut out any time for other aspects of operations that are essential to maintaining quality. This has certainly been true for training and supervision, particularly monitoring. Moreover, it is an obstacle to team building within PIO and with other Sections and offices, because there is never time for everyone to come together as a team. It appears also to limit, if not preclude, the use of some ways to reward superior performance and enhance job satisfaction, such as non-monetary rewards like time off, public recognition ceremonies, doing presentations at conferences, and taking special training courses. Assuming there is an organizational commitment to put a strong quality assurance system in place, PIO will need to address this issue of time.

Third, and related to the first two points, because PIO has a captive audience and most customers are adequately satisfied with the services they receive (although some are not knowledgeable enough to know when they have not been well-served), CO could choose not to invest further in quality assurance, beyond easy, low-cost tweaks to the system.

Depending on other demands on scarce resources, this may make sense. As a matter of principle, the study team would argue that government agencies are obligated to serve their customers to the best of their ability, although within reasonable limits relative to other demands for resources. But the study team acknowledges that there is a case for minimal intervention in PIO. This means that CO needs to decide how far it wants to push for high-quality customer service and be prepared to support whatever decision it makes.

Fourth, and most important, the intervention that probably will produce the most improvement in the quality of customer service is strong management of PIO.

Training

It was difficult for the study team to assess the quality of PIO training. It could only intuit from the problems the study identified that the PIO training program is weak in some areas. A key one is the absence of a training manual—which would serve both to guide staff training and to establish clear performance objectives and expectations for staff—and a training plan for both new hires and longer term staff. Having a dedicated team of trainers is also important for optimal and consistent knowledge and skill building; these people can also serve as mentors and coaches. Having such a team requires, however, provision of time to carry out this responsibility, and its inclusion in position descriptions. Similarly, training time needs to be carved out for staff on a regular basis, sometimes for all of them at the same time. Last, the training program would need to be reviewed periodically to bring it up to date with the reality of PIO's operations.

Based on the comments of interviewees, training is important to them. If the training program is structured properly, it can also be used to recognize staff for superior performance and as an incentive for improvement. Assignment of training responsibilities could be used as a mark of recognition if based on merit. Visits to exemplary contact centers, as is done in the Trademark Assistance Center, and participation at conferences would also benefit trainers. Trainers might also be given responsibility for more proactive outreach to the public on the meaning and benefits of copyright registration. Many information specialists said they enjoy this activity and were dismayed at the extent to which PIO's involvement had been curtailed.

Supervision

Whether at a contact center or other office, formal, regular supervision is an axiom of good management. Monitoring is a foremost tool of supervision and quality control, and is important for all staff regardless of time on the job and level of knowledge and experience, including managers, although the more senior staff typically require less frequent supervision. Fundamental to good supervision are clear standards against which to assess

performance and offer feedback. The study team looked at that element, as well as monitoring, feedback, and coaching/training, because they are the most critical to quality assurance.

It is clear from the findings of the study that there is a fundamental lack of supervision, particularly with respect to the above elements, at PIO. Many information specialists, being professionals, clearly wanted feedback to help them improve performance, and also saw its absence as a disservice when it came to performance evaluations, because it meant that they had had no opportunity to bring their work up to a higher standard and thus to achieve a higher performance rating.

The study team concludes that instituting system of regular supervision, particularly systematic monitoring, would benefit PIO greatly. A first step of necessity is to define performance expectations and standards, and offer training, as necessary, on how to meet them. Next would be a plan and schedule for when and how different staff would be monitored and offered feedback. As noted in the literature, in general one of the chief obstacles to regular monitoring is lack of time on the part of the supervisors, even though that task is fundamental to the position. Best practice suggests that the bulk of a supervisor's time should be spent on supervision, including monitoring and feedback. This is not the case in PIO.

The study team considered a number of mechanisms for monitoring staff—options include self-monitoring, peer monitoring, supervisor monitoring, third-party monitoring, or some combination thereof—but did not identify one as being better than another (see also Appendix D for further details on monitoring options). It believes that that decision must rest with I&RD and PIO management, with input from staff, and consideration of relative resource requirements, including not only funding, but also staff time.

Even the best monitoring system will do little for quality assurance unless accompanied by feedback and steps to address any identified problems. Feedback is best done as soon after the agent has completed the customer interaction, although that becomes less necessary if calls are recorded or there is access to emails after the fact.

Performance Evaluation

Based on comments by interviewees, the performance evaluation process in place in PIO is dysfunctional. It does not support the professional development of staff or further job satisfaction; to the contrary, in some ways it undermines morale, as it is perceived to be arbitrary and unfair in part because, absent monitoring, the basis for rating performance is not transparent. And again, performance expectations standards are lacking or unclear.

Even without being able to develop performance plans for staff because of Guild opposition, PIO could have a far better process than at present. At the very least, there need to be clear expectations and standards consistent with actual work performed and best practices for contact centers, clear metrics that staff need to meet to achieve each performance rating, guidance on what needs to be improved and a plan for providing training and other resources to that end, and sanctions and rewards commensurate with the evaluation of performance. Also important is that staff receive regular monitoring, linked to the performance evaluations, so that it is clear to them and the supervisor how well they are doing and so they have a chance to remedy weakness in their performance.

Customer Feedback System

There is clearly recognition of the need for customer feedback, as evidenced by the inclusion of a tool for collecting customer feedback as a deliverable of this study. Customer feedback is viewed within the contact center industry as a key part of a quality assurance system, and will need to part of PIO's. Based on the results of the online survey tested by the study team, despite the low number of responses at the time of this writing, a customer survey, either via interactive voice response (IVR) or online (neither of which requires participation by PIO staff, which can deter customer participation), would be a viable and fundamental part of measuring PIO customer satisfaction. Optimally, a survey has only a small number of questions, of which the most important ask customers to rate overall satisfaction and the accuracy and reliability of the information and services received. It is also important to offer customers an opportunity to complete the survey for each interaction with PIO. The other advantage of a survey is that the data can be used to set baseline metrics as performance standards once a sufficient number of responses has been received. The ideal is to integrate the results of the customer satisfaction survey with records of the interactions of individual customers in the CRM (see below). It is also useful periodically to conduct longer, in-depth web-based surveys of PIO customers, which is also a best practice for call centers.

Technology

The study team came away with the impression that Siebel 8.1, Outlook, and the upgraded Avaya systems offer additional features that would both improve customer service and support quality assurance through the collection of quantitative data. Of particular note is the potential for upgraded search functionality in Siebel 8.1 and the capacity of the new Avaya model to provide wait time to customers in the telephone queue.

Based on interviewee comments, it seemed to the study team that ITS and, to a lesser degree, CTO were perceived to be unsupportive of the contact center and customer service

and that there was some misinformation about one another. Certainly, the study team had some difficulty reaching people in ITS and CTO. The study team did not pursue this issue as it was beyond the scope of the study and cannot say if its perception is accurate. But it is concerned that the key parties, including CTO and ITS, that interact directly with customers or support quality customer service are not functioning as a team. That may be working to the detriment of customer service and quality assurance and merits further consideration.

If CO were to choose to make PIO an exemplary contact center, it will want to explore the type of sophisticated CRM system employed at the Trademark Assistance Center. Such a system may, however, be more than CO wants to invest in. The study team thinks that once CO determines what level of customer service it wants to achieve, it needs to develop a technology plan that supports that decision. In addition, there are more basic non-technology improvements to be made before the full benefits of significant technology upgrades can be realized. The study team thus believes that technology decisions are best left until the non-technology upgrades are in place and their impacts can be determined, and a plan is in place. That said, however, there is no reason not to pursue functions, such as notifying customers of call wait times and establishing a system for recording telephone calls, where they are available through existing technology or planned upgrades and are relatively easy to activate.

Recommendations

Senior CO Management

- Develop a CO-wide vision and guidance for superior customer service that make leadership's commitment and expectations clear, define a standard of excellence, and establish a culture of accountability for results.
- Define the roles of the different divisions and sections of CO in responding to customers' requests for service, and ensure employees have the training and resources to carry out those roles.
- Provide guidance on quality standards for customer service that CO offices should follow in developing their own performance standards and expectations, so that customers receive the same quality of service no matter where they go in CO. Customer service guidance should address at least: timely access to a live agent; accurate and complete responses to queries; first-call/email resolution where possible and, if a service request is transferred, notification of the customer to whom the request is being sent; monitoring of transfers and responses to make sure they are completed within a reasonable period of time; and professional, courteous treatment of customers.
- Establish a team approach to the provision of quality customer service that involves all staff who interact with customers or support the offices that do so—the contact centers, legal offices, technology and IT support offices, RRP, and senior management.
- Implement a specialized response system for dealing with customer inquiries and service requests based on their focus: eCO and other technology-related issues to CTO; status update questions to the Receipt Analysis & Control Division (RAC); examination-related questions to the RRP divisions; records-related questions to RR&C; and general information and problem resolution to PIO.
- Define and implement a technology plan that supports implementation of exemplary customer service and quality assurance.
- Adopt a customer-centric focus built around a comprehensive CRM that encompasses the records in the current Siebel CRM, but adds a CRM capacity for tracking and maintaining records on all customer interactions with CO. At a minimum, the system should maintain a record of all customer contacts with every CO division/office/section; track customer interactions that require follow-up,

identifying when, how, and by whom follow-up was to occur and what happened; initiate customer satisfaction surveys online or via IVR after each transaction; and produce regular reports of the state of customer service throughout CO, including levels of satisfaction, the number of open service requests by CO division, and statistics on the flow of work by division.

IR&D

- Develop a plan for implementing the CO-wide vision for superior customer service with respect to PIO and RR&C, and facilitate improved interaction with other offices.
- Ensure that PIO is managed to optimize customer service and assure quality.
- Establish and implement a robust quality assurance system within I&RD.
- Implement a reporting system for customer service that supports quality assurance.

PIO

Quality Assurance

- Establish and implement a robust quality assurance system.
 - Define clear standards and expectations for the elements of superior customer service and professional behavior, to include:
 - Accurate and complete information, the latter defined as anticipating and providing information that will be of value to the customer in making decisions and eliminate the need for further contact on the same matter.
 - Timely response to requests for service, including first-call/email resolution.
 - Interactions with customers that include: a greeting that opens with a friendly salutation (such as good morning), the name of the office and agent's name, and an offer to assist the customer; a request for a name, telephone number, and/or email address in case the call gets disconnected; referrals to the CO website and information on its use; and a closing that leaves the customer feeling that the PIO information specialist was genuinely pleased to have been of help and that the customer was important to both the agent and CO.

- Establish baseline metrics for each element of a customer interaction, based on customer feedback (see below), productivity data, and internal assessments of customer service, and develop a performance measurement plan, including:
 - Minimizing queue waits.
 - Providing wait times to callers in the queue
 - Offering an open-ended queue
 - Moving to an open-ended call duration standard
 - Establishing a 2-3 business day turnaround for responding to emails.
- Implement a formal training program that addresses new hire, refresher, and professional development training, supported by a training manual and plan and scheduled time for staff participation.
- Supervise staff on a regular basis.
 - Establish a standard for the percentage of a supervisor's time to be spent on that responsibility.
 - Conduct periodic formal and informal monitoring, feedback, and follow-up coaching and training, linked to the annual performance evaluation process.
 - Conduct periodic mystery shopping to ensure superior customer service.
 - Work with CO's legal staff to include their expertise in refresher training and monitoring of staff responses to assess accuracy and adherence to the boundary between information delivery and advice.
- Review, update, and augment all materials utilized by agents to respond to customers and by management for quality assurance to ensure they are up to date and accurate.
- Implement an effective performance evaluation process that

- Is based on clear, measurable performance standards and expectations for the information specialist and technical assistance positions.
 - Offers a transparent rating system.
 - Delivers an explanation to staff of how their rating was determined, guidance on what they need to do to achieve a higher rating, and a plan of action for improving performance.
 - Has a transparent incentives program that is clearly tied to performance.
- Implement a system for collecting customer feedback to track satisfaction.
 - Survey customers, either via IVR or online, asking a small number of questions that should include ratings for overall satisfaction and the accuracy and reliability of the information and services received.
 - Offer the survey following every customer interaction.
 - Periodically supplement the ongoing survey with longer, in-depth studies of customer satisfaction.
- Ensure that time is made available to implement and participate in quality assurance.

Productivity

- Explore the benefits and costs of a tiered staffing structure within PIO, with tier 1 handling general, non-specialized calls and tier 2 handling calls requiring in-depth expertise.

Public Information Office Background

Operating Environment

Before looking at the quality of customer service at PIO specifically, it is important to be aware of the environment in which PIO operates within CO. Two aspects of that environment—technology and the CO website—impose operational constraints and challenges over which PIO has little control and that affect how it functions and the level of its service requests.

Technology

Siebel. In 2008 CO implemented a Siebel CRM application. Problems with implementation led to significant delays in RRP’s review of copyright registration claims, with some taking two years or more before claimants received their registration certificate or a letter denying their claim. As a result, PIO saw a large increase in requests for status updates on in-process claims from often frustrated and angry customers. Status updates require searching the Siebel database. That process is time-consuming, as the Siebel system is slow, cumbersome, and unreliable because of its slow interface, number of screens that have to be navigated, and considerable downtime. In addition, Siebel as implemented offers limited search fields. If customers don’t have the appropriate information or something was entered incorrectly into Siebel, searches can be even more challenging and lengthy. Several staff also noted that the initial training on Siebel was very inadequate and that, even after working with the system for awhile, they still would like additional formal training.

It appears that this situation has improved in the last year, as the backlog has slowly decreased. A recent upgrade to Siebel 8.1 has made the system faster and more reliable. In addition, there has been a steady increase in online registrations, whose status copyright claimants can check online. These factors may reduce the number of status update calls PIO receives and speed up Siebel searches. The plan now, according to I&RD, is to have a working group from across CO look at a “wish list” of additional functions and features available in Siebel 8.1 and determine which to implement. One possibility is an improved search function.

eCO. In 2008 CO also brought eCO, an electronic copyright claim registration system, online. It is a much faster and cheaper way to register certain copyright claims and enables claimants to check the status online.

Despite the advantages of the new system, many customers find that it is difficult to use, and PIO gets many calls from customers seeking help. One PIO interviewee described the situation as follows:

I can see how a novice, general person, how our website could be more user friendly, especially the electronic process, especially eCO. When people say they went onto eCO and couldn't figure out where to go, I ask if they went to the tutorial. But people for the most part don't really read and help themselves. If we could make some strides in bettering the website, it would help. Instead of having people navigate through several forms to register online, CO should offer a single form that customers can scroll through.

While staff acknowledged that some people won't read the detailed instructions on the website, they agreed the system needs to be more user-friendly.

Migration from GroupWise to Outlook. During the course of the study, the Library of Congress switched from GroupWise to Outlook. There were the usual problems of learning to use the new system, particularly how to work with the new shared email address, Copyinfo, and the archiving of emails. The upgrade to Outlook 2010 scheduled for this fall may address some of the problems staff are experiencing with Outlook.

CO Website

The website, although not part of the study, arose frequently in both the customer and staff interviews, and clearly has also contributed to the increase in service calls to PIO. For that reason, comments about the website are reported here.

Although some customers were complimentary of the website, finding it easy and informative, a more common theme to emerge from the customer and staff interviews, and paralleled by the experience of the OP&A study team when trying to use the website, is that it is difficult to use. Specific complaints included:

- The website is hard to navigate to get to needed information. Specialists reported receiving calls, many repeats, from customers who were having trouble finding information, and not infrequently end up having to walk people through the website. On the other hand, one specialist noted that many people just don't want to bother with the website— "they don't want to go unless you tell them exactly 'click here, click here, and there's your answer.'" This person also complimented I&RD for beginning to address some of the website problems.

- The language on the website—“archaic language like ‘deposit copy’” is one example—geared to people with specialized knowledge about copyrights. Another interviewee commented that “Something that seems fundamental to us customers are calling about to ask for clarity.” This interviewee also pointed out that some customers may not “like what they read and call back for another answer.” One suggestion was easy-to-find definitions on the website.
- The search function on the website, which can be a challenge if the searcher doesn’t know CO terminology.
- Contradictory information on such things as registration claim processing times and fees frustrates people.⁶ “There needs to be more centralization of the information so it gets updated regularly, e.g., wait times [for processing registration claims]. It seems like fixing simple things would make things easier and reduce our phone calls a lot,” said one information specialist.

The CO website has a user evaluation function built in⁷ that allows users to rate three dimensions of the website and to give an overall rating, as well as provide text comments. The study team was told there are no benchmarks for comparing the website’s ratings with those of other organizations. Further, when it requested reports of the website evaluations, it received the raw responses rather than a management “dashboard” or operations report.⁸

Even without benchmarks against which to compare the ratings of the CO website, they were decidedly negative— overall and for each of the three dimensions, the top two ratings combined were below 50%.⁹ The mean overall rating for the CO website between January 1, 2010, and August 19, 2010, was 2.77 because there were more negative than positive responses. This value is significantly lower than the mean overall rating of 3.20 across OpinionLab clients, i.e., OpinionLab’s satisfaction benchmark.¹⁰ However, it is unclear to what extent the dissatisfaction is directed at eCO, which falls under CTO, or to other parts of the website, which are managed by I&RD.

⁶ See footnote 4.

⁷ The evaluation function is administered under contract by OpinionLab.

⁸ OpinionLab’s OnlinOpinion® Client Guide Version 2.4.2 (October 2009) shows an “O-Trend Report” on page 9 that presents a management dashboard with benchmarked statistics. The study team was not provided with such a report and was not certain if I&RD management receives it.

⁹ The distribution of ratings were: Content, 28% very negative (coded 1), 9% negative (coded 2), 19% neutral (coded 3), 17% positive (coded 4), 26% very positive (coded 5); Design, 30% very negative, 13% negative, 19% neutral, 16% positive, 22% very positive; Usability, 39% very negative, 12% negative, 16% neutral, 13% positive, 20% very positive; and Overall, 33% very negative, 14% negative, 19% neutral, 14% positive, 21% very positive.

¹⁰ Telephone conversation with OpinionLab, August 30, 2010.

Role of the Public Information Office

PIO is the public face and voice of the Copyright Office. Its role is to provide information and answer questions relating to US copyright law, regulations, practices, and procedures for the public, companies, and government agencies throughout the United States and around the world, and to facilitate access to CO services. It also receives claims for copyright registration and documents for recordation. Consistent with CO's push to get claimants to take advantages of its e-services, PIO encourages people to take advantage of the website and eCO online copyright claim registration system, explaining how to navigate the site as needed. As the public voice of CO, PIO plays a critical part in ensuring that customers get consistent and accurate information. Effectively, PIO is the Copyright Office's principal contact center.

PIO interprets its role to mean that it should do everything possible to make customer interaction with CO as easy, efficient, and productive as possible. One PIO staff member described it as giving "peace of mind, especially in content-related questions." Ideally, customers should not have to go beyond PIO to get the information they seek, and it endeavors to be a one-stop shop. PIO information specialists are expected to be thoroughly knowledgeable about the basic principles of copyright, and many have in-depth, specialized knowledge in specific copyright areas. In addition to answering people's questions, specialists are expected to anticipate what questions might come up and proactively provide additional information, and to encourage people to go to the website for information and online registration.

Given the range of questions PIO receives, specialists not only have to have a wide knowledge base, but to be skilled at taking that knowledge and applying it to specific situations. When additional information is needed, PIO's information specialists research the CO website, with which they must be very familiar, "pull on each other's background and knowledge," or seek assistance from other offices. Occasionally a specialist will refer a customer elsewhere. However, interviewees said that the vast majority of the service requests PIO handles in a day require only basic knowledge.

PIO strongly emphasizes that it only provides information, not legal advice. Its objective is to provide a customer sufficient information to be able to decide what to do next and how to do it, which might include hiring an attorney for legal advice. As one interviewee put it, "PIO has to tread a narrow line between information (big picture principles) and legal advice (recommendations). This is a big deal."

Nature and Volume of PIO Operations

Customers can receive live help from 8:30 am-5:00 pm (EST); recorded information is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week via the telephone and website. Staff work eight hour shifts between 6:00 am and 7:00 pm. The average workday for a PIO information specialist consists of two hours of responding to emails; 4-4.5 hours for calls; and a half hour for lunch and a 15-minute break in the morning and afternoon. Each staff member also has to spend 2.5 days per week at the front desk serving walk-in customers and, when not working with them, answering telephone calls. During the course of the day specialists also make callbacks to customers and consult with other staff or offices to get additional information or to check the accuracy of something. As time is available, they are expected to stay up-to-date on CO policy, law, and regulations, results of appeals, new technology at CO, and other matters. PIO also handles some tours of CO and makes presentations to different audiences, although in the last few years a large part of this outreach function has been shifted to other offices.

I&RD is starting implementation of a telework option. A potential benefit is that it would allow PIO to extend its hours to better accommodate West Coast customers.

In order of priority, information specialists are to answer telephone calls, assist walk-ins, and respond to emails. Telephone calls are the number one priority, and whenever specialists are not otherwise occupied, they should be answering calls.

Consistent with interviewee observations, the most frequent reasons why a customer calls PIO is to find out the status of their copyright registration claims (21,837 telephone calls, or 26% of the total¹¹), followed by how to register a copyright, particularly using eCO (around 25% according to interviewees). In the case of the latter, typical questions were what CO registration category to use, how long it takes to get the registration certificate, how to submit the “deposit copies” of copyrighted works, and what it costs to register a copyright. One interviewee commented that since the switch in 2008 to Siebel and subsequent delay in processing registration applications, along with the introduction of eCO, “our job is being transformed into search technicians. The emphasis [is] on efficiency and giving people status updates and teaching use of technology—it’s not on the knowledge base.” Many calls, as noted, are from people who tried unsuccessfully to use eCO, which led them to call PIO. Other queries are “all over the map.”

¹¹ The share of telephone calls involving status updates on claims in FY2009 was 54% of a total number of 107,886 calls. The total number of emails was 43,531. Projecting out for the last two months of FY2010, the number of telephone calls and emails appears to have dropped since FY2009, especially the number of status calls.

Telephone calls. Currently, customers can call three numbers to reach PIO. Customers calling one of the three current numbers enter a telephone tree with various options. Those selecting PIO go into a wait queue that now accommodates 12 callers, and a computer automatically distributes the calls to specialists when they become available. At the beginning of the call and during the wait in the queue, customers are referred to the website for information and online copyright registration. That said, at the time of this writing I&RD was about to implement a toll-free number. People having questions about eCO will be able to select that option and go directly to a staff member who can assist them.

As noted, responding to telephone is the priority, even though, as one interviewee said, “the CO emphasizes going online for information and communications.” Said one interviewee,

We don't want more than two people away from the phone working on emails, and we have lunch. We do intervals so that we can continually have people answering the phones and responding to customers. As long as you are not scheduled to be on lunch, at the front desk, or doing emails, you are expected to be attending the telephones (with the exception of breaks).

During the first ten months of fiscal year 2010, PIO received 83,780 telephone calls, or 8,378 calls per month. However, this figure did not include calls transferred from other offices, so the number is actually higher, and there are also callbacks to customers. Between July 19, 2010, and August 13, 2010, PIO information specialists fielded an average of 55 calls a day. The volume of calls was reported to be up significantly¹² since the introduction of the Siebel system because of the increase in status update requests and questions about registering a copyright, particularly using eCO according to interviewees (statistical data are not available for this service request). Interviewees noted that as the number of calls has increased, the staff hasn't.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, across the day the average number of staff answering telephone calls increases until 10 am and remains relatively constant until 5 pm. The number of calls abandoned peaks around 2 pm. The gap between the two lines in the figure shows the number of unanswered calls that end up abandoned. Figure 2 demonstrates that the average length of time that a customer has to wait peaks around mid-afternoon. In general, the performance of PIO call handling in terms of wait times and answered calls degrades through the afternoon.

¹² The number of telephone calls has dropped between FY2009 and the first ten months of FY 2010.

Figure 1
PIO Call Staffing and Call Abandonment by Time of Day

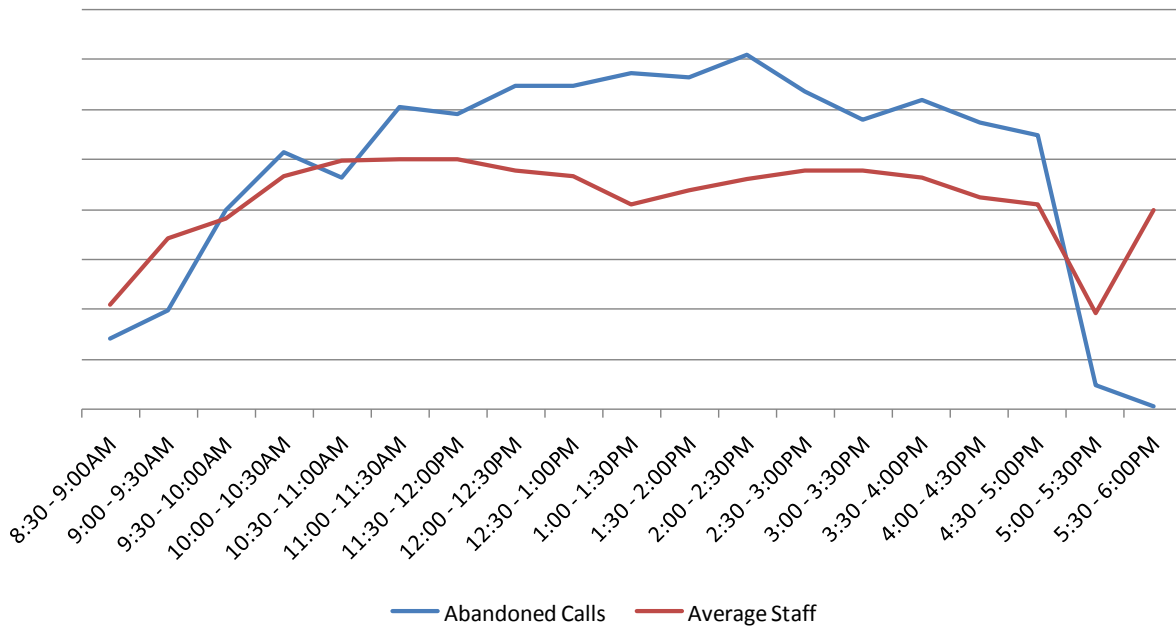
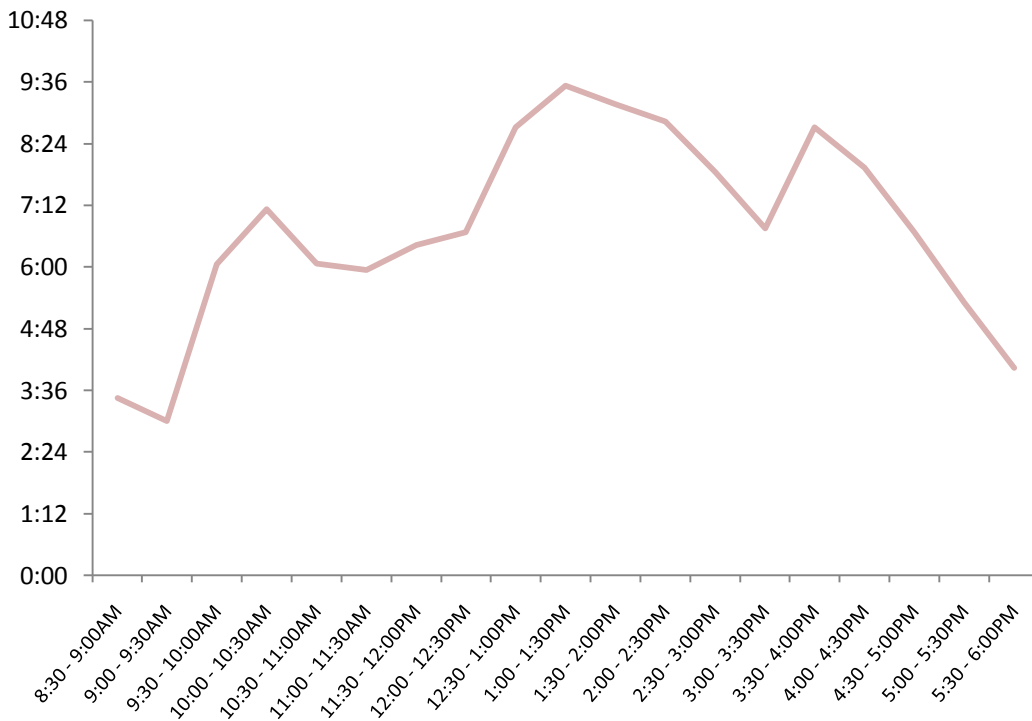


Figure 2
Average Time to Answer by Time of Day
 (minutes and seconds)



PIO staff members are supposed to answer calls within three minutes, which is far lower than the average actual wait time, as shown in Figure 2. The current Avaya telephone system does not have the capability to notify callers of the wait time in the queue. While a planned upgrade to the Avaya system will have that function, it was not clear if I&RD would implement it.

Once answered, the PIO standard for the average duration of a specialist's call is 3 minutes. During late July and early August, the average across the day was 4 minutes and 6 seconds. According to one interviewee, in the "best case scenario, a status update takes 3 minutes. But if they [the customers] don't have all the right info, it can be a wild goose chase." Another interviewee commented that the average may be "about 5-6 minutes because now we have a lot more issues to discuss with customers."

Emails. Emails come into a central PIO mailbox, CopyInfo. The first person to arrive in the morning distributes the emails to the specialists' mailboxes. Staff use prepared form letters and pattern paragraphs for some part or all of their answers, but most emails, according to interviewees, involve some original writing. Staff may search the CO website for additional information to provide, and they are also expected to refer people to specific places on the website where they can find additional information on their own.

On average, PIO received 2,611 emails a month in the first ten months of FY 2010.¹³ Projected out for the entire year, the figure would be 31,333. One interviewee commented that this level of emails is significantly higher than the 40 per week the office used to get, adding that "If you are out a day or two, like with the snow, they just pile up in your mailbox." There are a lot more emails to deal with on Mondays because of the weekend. While most staff thought 2 hours a day was generally enough time to handle the emails, sometimes they have trouble keeping up, but "there is no negative if you have a backlog of emails." Staff members are supposed to respond to emails within 5 business days.¹⁴ The reason for that standard, according to one interviewee, is to allow some cushion time for consultation with the General Counsel's office or to find information. The sense is that emails will go much faster with teleworking.

Walk-in customers. At least two information specialists are scheduled to work at the front desks, with one more added during peak times of the day. The most common work involves accepting copyright registration claims and processing related fees, for which customers get a receipt. In the case of completed applications, the specialists review them quickly to make sure they meet requirements. Staff may also help customers fill out applications. The front office has two public work stations off to one side at which

¹³No statistics were available for outbound emails to customers.

¹⁴ No statistics were available regarding meeting the 5-day standard.

customers can register their copyright online, with staff assistance as needed, or search the website for information. The front desks are equipped with computers and printers where specialists can prepare and print out receipts for fees and search for information. When specialists are not serving customers, they are expected to answer phone calls. According to one interviewee, "Time with walk-ins and on phones may be half and half, but it's hard to tell. Sometimes you put a person on hold so you can say to person waiting that you will be right with them after the call. People are pretty okay with that. In a perfect world you want to take care of walk-ins right away." This person thought that it would be better to have the specialists do emails as the second duty rather than telephone calls, as the former would not necessitate asking a customer to wait until a call is completed.

PIO received 540 walk-ins per month during the first ten months of FY 2010 and about 600 per month during FY 2009. Based on the OP&A study team's observations, customers rarely had to wait long to get served, and there were frequent periods when no customers were in the front office.

PIO Staff Structure

The Section Head of PIO, who reports to the Chief of I&RD, manages the office's operations and staff and is responsible for day-to-day supervision and performance evaluation of staff. As needed, the PIO Section Head also works the phones and handles calls that specialists decide to escalate. There are 13 GS7/9/11 information specialists, most at the GS 11 level. The specialists are members of the Library of Congress Professional Guild, which enters into agreements concerning workflow and operations of Library of Congress professionals.

Just recently, a technical assistant was detailed to PIO to handle routine work such as status updates and sending out emails with the link to the PIO customer satisfaction survey. I&RD sees a clear need for this type of GS 6/7/8 technical-level position and is now looking to create two such permanent positions. The thinking is that they will free up some of the information specialists' time for more substantive, specialized work, and also serve as entry-level positions from which staff could move up to become information specialists.

In 2007, PIO established two GS 12 team leader positions, which were filled by existing information specialists. One position became vacant in August 2009, and since then had been filled on a rotational basis among interested information specialists for periods of two months. The team leaders were to assist the information specialists, including providing training for new hires, but they did not have supervisory authority. As of this fall, both positions were vacant. The general sentiment was that the team leader position was not effective because of confusion about its roles and responsibilities, lack of management support, and poor performance of some team leaders, in part because of inadequate supervision.

Most interviewees thought PIO was short-staffed in general, but especially on Mondays and Fridays, which are the typical days off for staff on alternative work schedules. Interviewees also referenced a pattern of staff calling in sick on those days. Analysis by one staff member suggested that PIO had enough staff if they adhered to their work schedules and time allotted for lunch and breaks. The suggestion was made that more incentives and sanctions would be good ways to boost productivity.

Staff members have varied backgrounds, but most have come from elsewhere in CO, including RRP, or the Library of Congress. Thus some specialists have areas of deep expertise, say, in visual art or literary copyrights. Given the required level of knowledge and skills, and compared to CO registration specialists, who are GS 12s, and reference librarians, who are GS 13s, some information specialists thought the position is undergraded.¹⁵

When asked about the value of a stratified staff structure, with some staff assigned to answering basic questions like status updates and others handling those requiring greater content knowledge, some interviewees thought this might be a way to improve the efficiency of the office, with the added advantage that stratification might offer opportunities for promotion. Under this scenario, administrative staff would screen incoming calls and refer them to either technical or subject matter staff. This system, it was thought, could probably be done with the same number of staff as now, and “customers would never be sent into voicemail, in the belief that they wouldn’t mind a little more waiting if ultimately they get to a person who gives them good information. In contrast, with voicemail, people don’t believe they’ll get called back.”

Interoffice Relations

PIO engages regularly with several CO offices: I&RD, RRC, RRP, CTO, and the Office of the General Counsel, and less frequently with the Associate Register for Policy and International Affairs, whose work, however, impacts the information PIO needs to provide. Three issues arose with respect to interactions between PIO and these other offices. One is that PIO feels it has become a dumping ground for customer service that others don’t want to carry out. The second relates to the quality and consistency of the information CO is putting out.

- A general point that came out of the PIO staff interviews is that since it is the public face of CO and talks to customers, it is expected to “deal with whatever.” For

¹⁵ The higher graded (GS-13 and above) librarian positions in the Library tend to be either specialized or supervisory in nature rather than general reference.

example, during the re-engineering, status update queries were temporarily transferred from RAC to PIO, and were never transferred back. A similar situation arises with the Publications Section. PIO receives calls from customers who say they never got the forms they requested from that office, and ends up filling out an envelope for the Publications Section to ensure the forms go out. All these tasks take time away from PIO's principal information job. Part of the problem, said one person, is that there is no clarity on what to do with requests that come to PIO but that really belong with other divisions.

RRP was described as difficult to communicate with and not customer-friendly. There was a sense that RRP was being shielded from the public, even though it processes their claims and their position descriptions specify that examiners are to talk with applicants. In the opinion of some interviewees, RRP could quickly resolve many issues if its staff just spoke with people. Instead, a lot of what RRP should be doing is falling on PIO. Compounding the problem is that some RRP divisions have told PIO information specialists not to call the examiners because it slows the workflow. Said one information specialist, "We can only send examiners emails saying that a person called about a call you made to them, because the examiners don't want to take those calls." Sometimes RRP even emails its answer back to PIO to send out so that RRP doesn't have to deal with the claimant. PIO also gets repeat calls from customers whom the examiners hadn't called back or who didn't understand RRP's response. Nor do the PIO information specialists have any way of knowing if and when RRP contacts the customer transferred to it—until they get a call back from the customer. "That's a big pain for us," said one information specialist. "There is no way to identify things that need to be taken care of because someone hasn't responded to a customer." A related issue, according to another information specialist, is that PIO was told not to copy customers when referring their questions to RRP. One interviewee surmised that perhaps the problem is that RRP just sees applications as pieces of paper rather than as customers. Some PIO interviewees did point out that this situation is not uniform across all RRP divisions—the Literary Division has a team of the week that specialists can contact, and Motion Pictures assigns a person of the day to answer calls. Recently Performing Arts provided a contact for referrals, but the customer still goes into voicemail. One reason given for RRP is reluctant to be more accessible, beyond slowing down its workflow, is a fear that PIO will start sending it all sorts of calls that should stay with PIO.

PIO also pointed to some RRP examination practices have a negative impact on PIO's work because they lead to calls by angry customers. PIO tells customers that online applications take nine months to a year to process, and then a year later an angry

customer calls to ask what's happening because they haven't gotten their certificate. One reason is that RRP does not necessarily process claims on a first-in, first-out basis. Instead, it works on the simple applications because they go faster, and puts complicated ones aside, sometimes not getting back to them until a customer calls about the status. Another issue was that, in the past, if an applicant didn't respond to an email from RRP about a problem with the application during examination, RRP would contact the person again. Now, if the applicant doesn't respond in 60 or 90 days, RRP closes the case. One reason for no replies is that some CO emails are filtered as spam.

- PIO interviewees were troubled by the inaccurate or inconsistent information different parts of CO sometimes put out. Staff noted, however, that sometimes other offices, rather than referring a customer to PIO or consulting with it, give out information themselves that is not accurate. The OP&A study heard such instances in some RR&C responses to customers. When PIO sees inconsistencies or errors, it is conscientious about addressing the matter with the office. Other offices aren't conscientious about consulting with PIO. One interviewee noted that PIO is supposed to serve on committees so it can provide consistent information, but that doesn't always happen. Because PIO is the voice of CO, it believes that it should be the primary source of authoritative information. Staff were also bothered that CO sometimes seemed unwilling to be fully transparent about the long wait times for processing registration claims: the website gives a shorter wait time than does the PIO telephone prompt and the information specialists themselves. When customers find out the truth, it makes them angry, and often PIO bears the brunt of it. The person concluded, "We have to make sure we give accurate information, whether it makes us look good or bad."
- PIO specialists noted that they spend a fair amount of their time trying to resolve technical questions people have about eCO. However, CTO has a team of 10 contract technical specialists who are assigned just to answer customer questions about eCO and other issues with CO's e-service. The manager of the team, a CTO employee, helps out with calls as needed. After selecting the type of problem customers are calling about, customers are connected with one of the specialists, usually within a minute or two.
- The Office of the General Counsel and the Associate Register for Policy and International Affairs both thought it was important to interact more closely with PIO in terms of staying up-to-date on where copyright policy and law are going, what recent court decisions have been handed down and what the implications are, and what kinds of calls PIO might expect as a result of legal and policy changes and what

to say. Occasionally, these offices will communicate with PIO on emerging issues that might generate “a ton of calls,” advising them to send requestors to a certain place or identifying problem areas. According to one interviewee, in the past attorneys did presentations at PIO staff meetings on timely subjects or general copyright issues. The two legal offices also noted the importance of their being involved in developing, reviewing, and updating scripts/pattern paragraphs. In fact, they are planning to review and update the email pattern paragraphs in the near future. There was a suggestion that the legal offices and PIO develop a regular quality review schedule and face to face time.

Legal staff believed PIO information specialists could use them as a resource more than they do when they need expertise or consultation. On the other hand, the legal offices do not have a reputation for responding to things quickly. In that context, there was concern that because the information specialists are evaluated on how many calls they answer and how long they spent on the calls, they might be less willing to consult with legal staff.

Findings: Quality of Customer Service

Against the preceding backdrop, this section looks specifically at the quality of PIO's customer service. It begins with the feedback provided by customers in the OP&A study team interviews and in the online survey. It then describes what PIO staff thought about the service they provide, and ends with a summary of what the OP&A study team came away with from its observations of PIO and review of telephone calls and emails.

What Customers Said

Interviewees

Most PIO clients interviewed by the OP&A study team spoke highly of the information specialists and PIO and appreciated the overall service they received. Staff were described as professional and courteous. The most frequent complaints were directed not at PIO per se, but at aspects of CO operations over which PIO had no control, discussed above under "PIO's Operating Environment."

Despite the overall favorable reviews customer interviewees gave PIO, there was still dissatisfaction with certain aspects of PIO, although customer interviewees were often sympathetic with the PIO specialists and reluctant to criticize them.

- PIO was not always timely in its responses, particularly in the case of emails, which did not always meet the five-day turnaround standard. One customer related that "a couple of times I have sent medium-level difficulty questions, and it's taken a week or two for them to get back to me with a response." They also thought that the standard should be less than five days. There was also unhappiness about the call wait time to reach a specialist—some people mentioned being on the line for 10 minutes or more. At the same time, the wait time was not considered unreasonable when compared with those at other customer service agencies. Customers also said they understood how many customers called PIO and therefore did not fault the information specialists for the time in the queue.
- Customers identified variability in performance across PIO staff, with some specialists providing better service than others. One person commented, "A small majority of staff don't perform as well as they should. They are discourteous, provide inaccurate information." This person would advise avoiding certain specialists. A number of customers mentioned a lack of empathy on the part of some staff. For example, "They [the specialists] always talk to you like you should really know this, understand this ... They need to be more polite." Another customer

remarked that “it didn’t sound like they [the specialists] were happy to greet the person on the other end of the line.”

- Some customers said they had difficulty reaching an agent who could answer their questions and were frustrated at the number of times their call was transferred.

Survey Responses

As noted, the online survey was another source of customer feedback. As of this writing, 83 customers accessed the URL, and 68 completed the survey, for a completion rate of 82 percent. The study team has no information on how many customers were informed of the URL, but the team was aware that after the survey was available online, not every customer was told about it. Thus, the study team cannot estimate the percentage of customers who chose not to participate in the survey.

The findings reported here should not be considered significant because of the low number of respondents. However, they are suggestive, especially as they are consistent with the general customer satisfaction research literature.

Who responded. Of the survey respondents, 28 reported having done business with PIO, and six reported transactions with both PIO and RR&C.¹⁶ (Another 20 survey respondents who said they did not do business with either Section were excluded from analysis.¹⁷) Respondents who transacted business at both Sections were asked to evaluate their experience with either PIO or RR&C, resulting in 32 doing so for PIO.

PIO had more first-time customer interactions than RR&C, and a larger percentage of PIO customers were served over the telephone. Conversely, a larger percentage of RR&C customers walked into the Section than into PIO (Tables 1 and 2).

¹⁶ PIO handles a greater number of customer transactions annually.

¹⁷ It may be that a substantial number of customers were not aware of the name of the Section with which they are transacting business, or forgot it before doing the survey.

Table 1
Frequency of Customer Contact with PIO and RR&C Annually
 (percent)

Contact Frequency	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RR&C Combined
First time	55	43	50
1 to 5 times per year	34	48	40
More than 5 times per year	10	10	10

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2
Method of Customer Contact with PIO and RR&C
 (percent)

Contact Method	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RR&C Combined
Telephone	45	38	42
Walk-in	10	24	16
Email	38	33	36
Postal mail	3	0	2
Fax	0	5	2
Other	3	0	2

Both the CO website and internet searches played a substantial role in directing customers to PIO and RR&C. More than half of PIO respondents reported having visited the CO website (Table 3).

Table 3
Where Customers Got Information About Contacting PIO and RR&C
 (percent)

Source of Contact Information	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RR&C Combined
CO website	55	40	49
Local library	0	5	2
Web search	31	30	31
Other	31	20	26

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

PIO and RR&C customers described themselves differently. PIO customers were most likely to be the creators of material (69%), while larger percentages of RR&C customers were legal professionals or self-described “others” (Table 4).

The reasons customers gave for contacting PIO and RR&C were broadly distributed, but very few contacted either office to correct errors in Copyright communications (Table 5).

Table 4
Self-Description of Customers, PIO and RR&C
(percent)

Self-Description	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RR&C Combined
Creator	69	50	61
Legal professional	7	25	14
Publishing professional	3	0	2
Authorized agent	14	0	8
Potential user of copyrighted work	0	5	2
Other	7	20	12

How they rated their contacts with PIO. On a five-point scale (Delighted, Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Dissatisfied, and Very Dissatisfied), 46% of survey respondents said they were Delighted with their most recent contact with PIO (Table 6). Many world-class contact centers set a target of more than 90 percent of customers marking the top option. The percentage marking the top two ratings was 66%, while 18% selected Dissatisfied and Very dissatisfied combined.

Respondents gave more favorable ratings when it came to some specific aspects of their contact with PIO than they did for their overall satisfaction (Table 7). (These service aspects presented in Table 7 are discussed in the general literature on customer satisfaction.) For example, 100% of respondents were “Delighted with cleanliness, comfort, and layout of physical facilities.” On the two timeliness questions, 80% and 89% of respondents said the wait times were reasonable. In the case of a number of the questions relating to the empathy of the information specialists, the ratings were between 71% and 74%.

Customers gave the lowest ratings to:

- Telephone tree message very easy to understand and navigate (58%)
- Delighted about accuracy and reliability of information (52%)
- Answers never conflicted with earlier answers from CO (44%).

Table 5
Reasons for Customer Contact with PIO and RR&C
 (percent)

Reasons	PIO	RR&C
Because I could not find information on the Copyright Office Website	14	n.a.
I could not understand the language and information on the Copyright Office website	14	n.a.
To follow up on communication from the Copyright Office	9	10
To correct error in a Copyright Office communication	3	5
To register a claim to copyright for a new work	12	n.a.
To obtain information on how to register a copyright	19	n.a.
To check on status of my registration claim	25	n.a.
To obtain information on copyright fees	6	n.a.
To check registration status of someone else's copyright	3	n.a.
To obtain a certified copy of my copyright registration	n.a.	21
To conduct a search of Copyright registrations	n.a.	26
To pay for a service provided by the Registration, Research & Certification Section	n.a.	10
To obtain information on conducting a registration search	n.a.	16
To obtain information on getting a certified copy of my registration certification	n.a.	21
Other	28	21

n.a. Not asked for that office.

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

Table 6
How Customers Felt About Their Most Recent Contact with PIO and RR&C
 (percent)

Satisfaction Ratings	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RRC Combined
Delighted	46	40	44
Very satisfied	21	20	21
Satisfied	14	10	12
Dissatisfied	7	15	10
Very dissatisfied	11	15	12

Further analysis was carried out using cross-tabulations of respondent ratings for the different aspects of the contacts listed in Table 7 with their ratings for the overall experience. The following aspects are significantly correlated with customers' overall satisfaction ratings and can be considered a statistically significant¹⁸ predictor of customer satisfaction with this sample of surveyed PIO customers:

- Communication was easy to understand and useful.
- Responsiveness in answering questions.
- Cared about customer as an individual.
- Sensitive to customer's needs.
- Treated questions as important.
- Accuracy and reliability of information.
- Questions handled in a professional manner.
- Waiting time to talk with a representative.
- Waiting time before a representative was able to help.
- Treated with respect and courtesy.

¹⁸ Based on the chi square statistic.

Table 7
How Customers Felt About Different Aspects of
Their Most Recent Contact with PIO and RR&C
(percent of customers selecting the most favorable rating option)

Interaction Aspect	PIO	RR&C	PIO & RR&C Combined
Waited a reasonable time to talk with a representative	80	100	88
Waited a reasonable time before a representative was able to help	89	94	91
Telephone tree message very easy to understand and navigate	58	40	53
Delighted with cleanliness, comfort, and layout of physical facilities	100	75	86
Completely treated with respect and courtesy	88	95	91
Communication was easy to understand and useful	74	79	76
Completely responsive in answering questions	82	84	83
Cared about customer as an individual	71	79	74
Completely sensitive to customer's needs	74	79	76
Treated questions as very important	73	74	73
Delighted about accuracy and reliability of information	52	44	49
Questions handled in a professional manner	82	79	80
Answers never conflicted with earlier answers from CO	44	n.a.	n.a.

n.a. Not asked for that office.

Even though the number of responses is small, the study team used logistic regression¹⁹ to explore the relationships further. The rating of one aspect of customer service emerged as the most important predictor of the level at which customers in this sample rated their satisfaction: “How did you feel about the accuracy and reliability of the information you received?” Although other aspects were also significantly correlated with overall satisfaction, accuracy and reliability is the most important statistically. That is, although other aspects were also significantly correlated with overall satisfaction, accuracy and reliability is the most important statistically.

Just over three quarters of respondents who rated their contact with PIO said that they would recommend PIO as a good way to handle copyright questions: 77% Definitely; 12% Likely; 4% Not sure; 4% Somewhat unlikely; and 4% Very unlikely.

Within the very small number of respondents who contacted PIO to check on the status of their claim, a majority would prefer to talk with PIO rather than use the CO website to check the status of their registration claim, even when they had a service record number: 57% Would prefer to call PIO by telephone; 14% Definitely would use the website if possible; 14% Probably would use the website if possible; and 14% Not sure.

What PIO Staff Said

PIO staff thought the office was doing a good job of satisfying customers—they gave levels of customer satisfaction ranging from 75% to 90%. They thought PIO’s strength was public interaction, along with efficiency. Also rated high was the specialists’ ability to determine what customers needed and being patient with those confused by the system.

Although the main complaint was the delay in processing the applications, staff also mentioned issues with PIO’s service:

- **Poor attitude**, particularly impatience. This point was cited the most often. The very strong emphasis on the number of calls answered meant some staff tried to keep their calls as short as possible, which was said to contribute to occasional brusqueness. One specialist said that PIO was getting “a lot of calls back because people feel they have been rushed on the phone, because the specialist is trying to keep the call to three minutes or less ... I can’t tell you how many times someone calls saying they rushed me, or didn’t answer my questions.” This person noted, “You can’t have it both ways; something will suffer” and argued for more attention to “quality—to make sure that the information going out is accurate and correct and sufficient enough so the person doesn’t have to call back.” The pressure to move

¹⁹ Dichotomized satisfaction (Delighted and all other categories) was regressed on the different aspects of customer service in Table 7.

quickly applied to emails as well, with one interviewee suggesting, “Give us the proper time to handle emails effectively. If you refer them to a circular, give them a link.”

- **Incomplete or incorrect information.** An interviewee stated that “On one level, [customers] are satisfied because they have someone who is very emphatic and directive, and feel they are getting accurate information, but don’t get the opportunity to know it’s not that black and white.” Another specialist, however, did not think PIO was giving out much incorrect, at least based on customer feedback.
- **Slow response times.** Staff noted that there were always people waiting in the telephone queue, with the number sometimes reaching 12 during peak periods,²⁰ which meant that some callers might have gotten busy signals. In addition, PIO often did not meet the standard of answering calls within three minutes, as noted. In fact, one interviewee said that “Now the queue has been opened, the wait time has doubled. The average wait time is about 5-6 minutes.” The OP&A study team similarly observed wait times over 3 minutes, including up to 15 minutes; the I&RD database shows, as noted, an average wait time of 4 minutes and 6 seconds.
- **Insufficient proactive public education.** Staff members suggested that PIO used to be more active in educating the public, for example, through presentations, about the benefits of registering a copyright and how to do it. That part of PIO’s work has been cut back, and staff thought that CO should return to doing more proactive outreach, particularly about online registration. There were even suggestions about distance learning on how to access and use the online system and about doing radio and television spots.

What the OP&A Study Team Found

As noted, the OP&A study team reviewed all modes of interaction with customers, the statistical data compiled for each mode, and internal documents; interviewed staff, customers, support personnel, and representatives from two contact centers considered to be exemplary and a third-party contact center service provider; and conducted a customer satisfaction survey. This section presents the main points that emerged from the data.

²⁰ The telephone service is programmed to allow 12 calls to be queued. After that, callers receive a busy signal.

Telephone Calls

Several points emerged from the study team's review of the recorded telephone calls. In terms of the overall rating, most calls met the performance expectations as defined by PIO.²¹ When looking at the ratings for the individual elements, however, a different pattern emerged with respect to three elements in particular: Assurance, Empathy, and Timeliness.

- *Empathy* received the most negative ratings. The specialists too often seemed impatient and abrupt with customers, particularly if the customer rambled or was confused. Specialists were heard talking over customers or interrupting them, and occasionally transferred customers while they were speaking. On one call, the OP&A reviewer heard a specialist interrupt the caller and talk over him in a very condescending manner that the customer felt the need to say, "Thank you very much. I'm sorry to bother you." In some cases the specialist did not take the time to listen to and understand a customer's question(s) before responding, so that it was not uncommon to hear a customer having to repeat a question or even correct the specialist because the answer provided was not relevant.

The study team members were struck by the considerable inconsistency across the information specialists with respect to certain aspects of the interactions with customers, such as how they opened the conversation. Some specialists began with a friendly greeting and the name of the office, and sometimes gave their own names, whereas one specialist started the call with a brusque "Yes?" The study team was not aware, however, of any guidance on how staff should open and close their calls.

- With respect to *assurance*, the OP&A study team found instances, although not many of incorrect information, but must point out that it is not particularly knowledgeable about the subject of copyrights and CO procedures and processes. Most of the time the specialists took the time needed to respond to customers thoroughly, such as walking them through necessary steps on the website and trying to locate needed information. Some specialists clearly worked to anticipate questions a customer might have down the road and to provide relevant information proactively so as to minimize the need for a follow-up call.

That said, there was variability in the thoroughness of the services and information specialists provided. In addition, the study team encountered a number of instances of what it considered to be incomplete answers both with respect to the question

²¹ The study team cannot provided percentages because of the small number of calls reviewed, the possibility that some specialists were overrepresented in the calls reviewed and others were underrepresented, and the subjectivity involved in the rating process, despite a process intended to minimize it.

being asked and to anticipating follow-up questions a customer was likely to have. For example, when a customer asked about the time it took to get a certificate of registration, and happened to comment that he/she wanted to market the copyrighted material, the specialist informed the customer that the wait was two years but did not add that the date of receipt of a completed application by CO was the effective date of registration, and that the customer did not have to wait for the registration certificate to market the material. Another example involved a customer who wanted to apply to register a script online and wasn't sure how to submit the deposit copy. She noted in passing that she would be copyrighting several scripts. The customer was told only that once she paid the fee, she would see the option to print out a label that she could use to mail the script in. The specialist did not solicit information from the customer to determine if an online deposit copy submission was possible or whether the customer could submit more than one script at a time to avoid multiple fees. Some agents showed little patience in helping customers use the website.

- As to *timeliness*, the study team frequently observed wait times that exceeded the standard of three minutes and that extended into the 12-15 minute range. Upon occasion, all the slots had customers waiting, which left the study team wondering how many callers might be receiving busy signals.

The study team spent a fair amount of time at PIO while it was conducting interviews, gathering information, and observing walk-ins. It did not conduct a systematic study of what specialists were doing, but members of the team were in agreement that on several occasions it appeared the number of agents answering phone calls was less than the number scheduled for those times, and that specialists did not always seem to be working.

The results of the mystery shopping by OP&A staff were consistent with the study's other findings. The information specialists varied in the accuracy and completeness of the answers to customers' questions. Some specialists provided quite minimal information or personalized help; they did not offer much contextual information about CO's current registration process and situation. There was little effort to anticipate and answer likely follow-up questions. The mystery shoppers said that some specialists were curt, noting specific examples such as "No, you don't," "Yes!," "It's all under the forms link," and "Visit our site and take a look around ... and that's it!" The call duration of these calls was short.

On the other hand, the mystery shoppers had some very positive interactions in which specialists provided substantive responses, were attentive, anticipated follow-up questions, referenced specific web pages and circulars, and, in one case, suggested a contact with a specific division in CO. They told mystery shoppers why it might be important to register their copyright and discussed the procedures and timeframes for

paper and online registration; they made reference to specific circulars; and they provided customers with alternative next steps, such as “If you have to go to court for any litigation, you need a certificate from us [CO],” “You might review your company’s policy,” “I can have someone who knows more about the Performing Arts registration contact you,” and “I recommend you read circular 56 and 56a because those deal with musical composition.” Specialists also emphasized the importance of the effective date of registration. Noticeably, the calls that the mystery shoppers rated higher because of their substantive information were longer than their counterparts.

Emails

Here, too, the study team found inconsistency in the quality of responses.

- *Empathy* was again problematic. Responses often seemed abrupt, unprofessional, and informal, and the specialists’ tone made them seem insensitive and unsympathetic. Some emails contained incorrect grammar. Although PIO procedure is for specialists to put their initials at the end of all written responses, in many cases there were no initials. It is also standard procedure to copy customers when their emails were forwarded to another office, but this, too, did not always happen.
- The PIO email responses were sometimes insufficiently *responsive*. For instance, a customer sent PIO an e-mail asking if there was a way to conduct an online search for images and texts that were already in use. The agent responded that the Copyright Office doesn’t perform searches to compare copies of works. When a customer’s question was unclear, the specialists did not always seek clarification and instead gave answers that did not fully address the question. In other instances where a customer asked multiple questions, all of them were not always addressed. A case in point is a customer who sent an e-mail with ten questions, and got an answer only to the first one.
- As noted, the *timeliness* standard of responding to emails within five business days was missed in a high percentage of the emails the study team reviewed.
- *Assurance* received relatively few low ratings. The specialists typically tried to provide thorough responses that clearly explained the steps a customer had to follow, and some specialists gave the customers answers to anticipated follow-up questions and references for follow-up information. Nevertheless, here, too, there was variability, with some agents failing to provide thorough responses, requiring that the customer ask multiple questions in follow-up emails.

Walk-ins

In-person interactions received satisfactory ratings more often than the other two modes of interaction.

- With respect to *timeliness*, only occasionally did a customer have to wait because the specialists at the front desk were speaking with customers on the telephone, and the wait time was usually not over three minutes.
- The information specialists rated well for *empathy*—they came across as professional and treated customers with courtesy and respect. In one interaction, a particularly friendly and helpful specialist gave the customer directions to her next destination, and upon request took the customer’s picture by the US Copyright Office seal. On another occasion, a specialist walked a customer to the RR&C Reading Room as she had not been there before. The study team observed only a couple of instances of impatience and unprofessional behavior.
- *Assurance* received particularly high ratings. The specialists gave detailed replies and went out of their way to sufficiently answer customers’ questions. One specialist was observed providing the customer with copious amounts of information, including CO pamphlets and computer printouts, and showed the customer where on the CO website to find more information.

Findings: Quality Assurance at PIO

The study team looked at what quality assurance systems PIO had in place for customer service, focusing on four aspects: training; supervision, including performance monitoring and feedback; performance evaluation; and job satisfaction, this latter because it is generally held that dissatisfaction with the job often results in a lower quality of service.

Training

PIO interviewees seemed reasonably satisfied with the training that new hires receive. New specialists were said to undergo a year of training, during which they were expected to become widely knowledgeable about, according to one interviewee,

All things copyright-related: the Compendium, copyright procedures and practices, copyright law Title 17, the Code of Federal Regulations [CFR 37], the information in the circulars and fact sheets. Individuals have to be able to articulate the information in-person, in writing, and through the telephone.

Trainees get a list of the materials they are responsible for knowing and are expected to spend time learning the material and exploring and getting to know the CO website. There is, however, no test or review to ensure trainees know the right information, other than monitoring of their interactions with customers. Other aspects of new staff training are PIO procedures (e.g., how to do the daily job, including the front desk, the sorts of things that are likely to arise and how to respond, how to determine what a customer is asking and to tailor the response accordingly, and where to find pattern paragraphs and language resources); and customer service training

Much of the training is hands-on or involves shadowing the trainers, who are experienced information specialists. In addition, the work and interactions of new hires with customers are monitored for several months. For example, someone listens to telephone exchanges, reviews email responses, and provides feedback.

One interviewee who was somewhat critical of the training described it as broad in scope and not particularly in-depth, and mentioned being “thrown into the fire” with less training than was desirable. This person also didn’t think enough time was provided for the training, for example, for learning not just the base knowledge, but also how to take that knowledge and apply it to a multitude of different situations. It often was not possible to carve out time for regular training sessions every day.

Other points emerged on PIO training. Given the broad scope of issues PIO deals with, the training can be extremely overwhelming, especially when it is not structured and

consistent. It was also not clear to the study team if PIO had specialized trainers; one interviewee commented on the dispersal of training responsibilities to staff in inconsistent ways. The training needs to take place in “a more conducive environment, especially for new employees. The overriding factor is the phones, the phones, whether it’s training, going to a meeting, or anything. [And] you get no specific training on being a phone person. Our training was in copyright laws.” Last, the training doesn’t provide enough information about offices in CO, such as RAC, and what they do, nor were new hires introduced to staff they would be working with in the other offices.

The OP&A study team asked for copies of operating procedures and training manuals and materials but was told that they do not exist. One PIO staff member recently put together a draft training manual and plan, but they were never formally adopted or used. The study team observed, as discussed in more detail below, that PIO had nothing that clearly delineated performance expectations and standards to guide new hires.

In contrast to opinions about the training for new hires, PIO staff members were more critical about the lack of regularly offered ongoing training, such as refresher sessions and regular updates on policy, procedures, technology, and the like. Said one person, “It needs to happen, but it does not happen. Training is good for staff development and giving a quality product. We have conflict resolution courses offered at the Library of Congress, but they are optional courses, and not specific to the CO.” Another person mentioned the availability of some online courses but thought people weren’t willing to access them and do the work. A particular concern was what most staff considered to be inadequate training on Siebel—“You had a major overhaul of the system, and we give you 1-2 days of training. So we had to stumble through until we had some grasp on it.” Some still wanted additional formal training on the system. Given specialists’ tight schedules and the heavy emphasis on staffing the phones at all times, the study team wondered if it were even possible to schedule regular training or to allow staff time off to attend courses.

One mechanism that organizations typically use for informal training is the staff meeting. A number of staff mentioned problems with PIO staff meetings, which are scheduled for one hour on Wednesday mornings every two weeks. Staff saw the meetings as potentially important opportunities to share knowledge, solve problems, and get updates. However, staff said, the meetings were too often truncated and even cancelled because PIO requires that the phones be staffed at all times, and it was often difficult to get staff from other offices, principally RR&C but sometimes I&RD and RRP, to cover the phones. Sometimes they cannot get to PIO on time. In the case of RRP, because of the backlog in processing registration claims, some division supervisors will not release staff to help out. If enough coverage can’t be found or coverage staff members arrive late, PIO staff must remain behind to cover the front desk and answer the phones. Meetings may also start late

because the covering staff members arrive late; PIO staff may have to leave the meeting early if a covering staff person has to leave; and the meetings get interrupted when a person covering the desk has a question. An OP&A team member observed all of these problems occur at one staff meeting. Compounding the problem of telephone coverage is that it appears RR&C schedules its meetings on the afternoons of the same days that PIO meets, and PIO staff are supposed to cover RR&C's phones. While a logical solution would seem to be closing PIO on a set schedule to permit time for meetings, management is concerned that they won't be able to alert people to change in hours, particularly because of the heavy publicizing of the current hours. There is also the hope that as the backlog diminishes, more RRP staff will be available to cover PIO at meeting times.

One person summed up the problem with staff meetings as follows:

We need more regular meetings and documents that tell us more about the typical problems, so we can qualify our answers to head off questions. Meetings should include ongoing training ... should be more regular. They tend to be ad hoc, when there are enough agenda items, although they are to occur every other Wednesday. We need to be more proactive. If we have a meeting time, use it for training if there is nothing else on the agenda. Or ask staff to present things on different topics. We are reactive to what concerns staff raise.

This person had a number of suggestions:

Depending on when the meeting is, close the phones and give people a time to call back, or an emergency number. Or if other staff are covering, ask them to get call back numbers and to determine the general nature of the question. Then we should have time for callbacks. Things meetings do/should cover: Siebel, changes in systems/procedures, changes in Federal Register etc., Outlook, info from the committees staff are on—and PIO staff can take PIO info back to the committees—guest speakers like Liz [Scheffler, the Copyright Office COO], to update on macro things, like how CO is addressing an issue like the Google thing at UMich.

Yet another interviewee commented that should do more to share information.

We need to be on the same page, so that could be formalized. The biweekly section meetings are not enough time for sharing even the really important things. There is too much to cover in the bimonthly 1-hour meetings. That is all the time we have because of the insistence on continuous phone coverage, and the reluctance of other offices to help, such as Registration. ... Other than that, there is no procedure for information sharing.

Some interviewees thought that it would be good to have legal staff meet with PIO on a regular basis to update them on current cases, issues, and policy, but nothing has come of that suggestion. However, mention was made that the acting director of I&RD does come to meetings to provide updates, something PIO staff appreciated.

It also does not appear that the specialists' work schedules set aside time for reading up on changes in policy, procedures, law, court decisions on copyright cases, new technology, etc. Rather, they are expected squeeze it in whenever they can. Again, when the question of providing dedicated time for training or getting up-to-date is raised, the answer is always that closing PIO for even a short period is not an option.

Supervision

It was not uncommon for the study team to hear interviewees say that supervision of staff is inadequate—for example, “The state of supervision in PIO does not seem to be one that keeps customer satisfaction in mind, as structure, reliability, and accountability are fractured.” Mentioned the most often was the lack of adequate monitoring and feedback.

The literature on best practices in contact centers and what the study team observed at the two exemplary contact centers make clear that monitoring of staff is a primary tool of supervision and critical to quality assurance. Based on the interviews with staff, it appeared to the study team that, except in the case of new hires, virtually the only monitoring taking place involved the collection of quantitative data on such things as average call wait times and duration of calls. Although staff said they got data on their own work, as well as data showing how they compared with others in PIO, there was not much substantive discussion about their performance and what they needed to change and how they might go about it. Said one person, “If I get feedback, it will be during evaluation time, nothing in the interim.” Instead, staff are just told generally that they’re doing a great job and encouraged to work hard, particularly if the office is down staff temporarily. “But,” as one person said, “that’s not going to change anything; I’m going to do my best regardless.” Another person commented, “If I was a supervisor, I would talk to people directly who had a problem, instead of putting something out to everybody. For example, if a staff member is not pulling his or her weight, and everyone sees that, it’s important to deal with that person, rather than telling everyone that it’s important to work hard.”

The only regular qualitative monitoring and feedback the study team heard about was for new hires. In that case, the supervisor or other information specialists would listen in on new hires' phone calls via headsets plugged into their telephones. At present, there is no capability for recording calls to review at a later time.

Several interviewees expressed a strong interest in regular assessments and feedback, perhaps quarterly. For example,

It would be neat if the evaluators listened to our calls. It is important to be complete with the public, especially if they have been waiting a long time. ... [I] would like a system that recognizes how good the information provided was, especially to a frequent user. No one mentions the quality of emails and calls.

Another person called for “routine monitoring. Monitor random calls. That works better than a supervisor sitting down with someone, because they will perform better. Recording [the calls] would work.”

The study team found no evidence that monitoring and feedback are treated as an essential part of operations and quality assurance. Instead, the Section Head relies on customers to bring problems to PIO’s attention. However, there is at present no formal, ongoing system for collecting customer feedback (such a system is one deliverable of the current study).

Performance Evaluation

This aspect of PIO operations got the largest number of complaints. The dominant theme was the absence of an effective performance evaluation system, which to some staff undercuts the emphasis on quality customer service. Several themes stood out:

- A number of staff expressed concern over the emphasis on quantity over quality, as evidenced by the focus on quantitative standards for the number of phone calls answered and the duration of calls, over quality. Explained one person, “The evaluation system misses the quality of the information provided,” while another pointed out

We are dealing with the vast public out there, with a range of questions, way more complicated than before. We are supposed to have knowledge and to answer calls. Many people have multiple questions. Since our evaluation is based on this, a lot of us feel we need to stay in the 3 minute time. Sometimes customers call back and say people have been rude to them and they feel rushed, and the person didn’t answer all their questions. But we feel the time pressure from our supervisor. He is dealing with the electronic recordkeeping system that breaks it down to call duration by specialist, etc. Too much focus in on quantity vs. quality. We could track whether something is a simple or complicated call, but we don’t do that now. They only want us to track the status calls because they directly relate to the registration system.

Beyond the quantitative measures, staff said that they did not know what they were being evaluated for and on what basis, e.g., what standards or performance expectations were being used. Some staff thought the performance reviews were based on the position descriptions detailing the specialists' job, but said those don't contain clear standards and benchmarks, or staff are not made aware of them. One person questioned whether the position descriptions even matched the reality of the work. A consequence of the weak performance evaluation system, according to one interviewee, is that "people don't know that if there is any recognition of accomplishments, strengths, abilities, or if there are issues. So they feel they can get away with things." Several staff said that the Guild was a big part of the problem because its position is that professionals should not be subject to performance plans. I&RD, however, recently established performance plans for staff covered by the Employees' Union (AFSCME Local 2477) and believes that it needs to extend them and also to have individual performance plans. The hope is to have along the lines of performance plans in place in September.

- Transparent standards, staff said, would help them improve their performance. Efforts to develop clear performance standards using the position descriptions and the collective bargaining agreement went nowhere until recently. Now there is some sense that things are beginning to change. One person said that under pressure from members of the Guild, that stance is beginning to shift, and I&RD is looking hard at the performance evaluation process and hoping to make some changes in the near future. Said one person, "Employees have to know where they stand against their peers. That's being resolved because of our outspokenness and insistence, and because new management hears us."

Still, there is concern that the main measures will remain quantitative. Although management says it wants good quality response, the bottom line in the evaluation is still numbers, and "[management] don't care how the person got that number up. [Is that] a good measure?"

- The performance evaluations are not seen as useful. In particular, staff complained that they were not told why they received a specific performance rating and what they needed to do to achieve a higher rating. This is a major issue because of the financial implications. Said one person, "I receive an Excellent every year, and I have yet to be told explanations or what it would take for me to go from Excellent to Outstanding, although I ask every year." Another person described the annual evaluation as pretty general, but said, "I guess it has to be because if throughout the year you don't pull someone aside and tell them ... just asking how's it going, what do you feel a supervisor can do to help you out—there's none of that back and forth,

bouncing things off each other. I wish that was better.” Someone else found the process somewhat meaningless because “no specialist is ever written-up; usually there is a conversation, and then all is erased. There is security in this office, but there is no accountability.”

- The performance evaluations do not always seem fair. They occur once a year, and until that time staff may not have gotten any feedback that might have helped them improve their performance and thus get a better rating. One person questioned how the quality of their performance can be assessed unless it is monitored in-person, and that doesn't happen. No one was “coming out and saying, ‘this is what’s going on this month, this is the average of each person.’ They would wait until your evaluations and say, ‘well, you’re Satisfactory, and I want you to be Excellent.’ What do I have to do to achieve that goal?” Another point was that PIO is always emphasizing answering the phones and relatively pays little attention to what happens with emails and walk-ins. Yet emails are discussed during the evaluation.
- Staff also pointed to an inherent contradiction in the evaluation process. On the one hand, they are told to provide complete answers, including anticipating possible follow-on questions and referring people to information on the website. On the other hand, the evaluations emphasize quantity, which penalizes those staff who are willing to take the time to provide thorough answers. But in the end, that choice to be thorough can mean getting a lower evaluation rating and therefore not getting a promotion. One specialist had another point to make: “they hound us about the time spent on phone calls, but it seems that they are ignoring how much more difficult the system has become.”

Job Satisfaction

Most world-class call centers recognize that employee satisfaction is a primary predictor of productivity and efficiency, and the OP&A study team asked staff what they liked best and least about their jobs, and what would improve working conditions. Most staff clearly enjoyed working with and helping customers; that was what drew them to PIO. Said one interviewee, “The best aspect of the job is the public. You get yahoos, and you get interesting people with interesting projects, with really interesting conversations while you do your work.” People also enjoyed the feeling of being part of a team at PIO. Staff work together, ask each other questions, overhear what someone else is saying, and “That’s important, because it is hard for a person to learn everything.” There was also good camaraderie. As one person put it, “my colleagues—they are bright and have great humor.”

On the downside, staff cited a morale issue because of too little feedback and the poor performance evaluation process, and added other factors:

- There was a sense that other sections have someone going to bat for them within CO. In contrast, PIO is like a “dumping ground.” It was not clear that CO appreciates PIO, as evidenced by staff being underpaid and higher ups seeming not to know what PIO has to do. Did management understand that they are dealing with “an irate, very frustrated public” because of registration system? Morale would be better, some interviewees said, if they felt someone was advocating for them, say, to shift the status update calls out of PIO. That said, there was appreciation for the Acting Chief of I&RD, who seemed to be the first person in a long time who listened to the staff and actually followed up to make things happen.
- Staff talked about the lack of incentives available in PIO, including a limited career ladder and financial rewards. One person said forcefully, “We aren’t dumb. You don’t appreciate us, so why should we put out? Give real awards, not cake.” The OP&A study team was told that financial awards and time-off—the latter would of course be problematic for PIO. And it is possible to provide an extra step increase for staff getting Outstanding on their performance evaluation. The study team, however, does not recall that anyone mentioned having received anything. Some staff thought offering teleworking as an incentive might improve morale and enhance productivity. As noted, I&RD is now pilot testing a limited version of teleworking.
- The emphasis on quantity over quality. PIO is “a numbers game. Before you felt good about the quality you could deliver. Now you don’t because of the statistics.”

Findings: Best Practices for Contact Centers

Following is a summary of the main points about best practices for contact centers that came out of the literature review and the interviews with the USPTO contact centers and Convergys. Additional information is provided in Appendix B.

Leadership

- Contact centers are only as good as their leadership.
- A strong, overt commitment to customer service and first-call resolution (FCR) is clearly in evidence.
- Leadership is a behavioral model for employees.
- The future of the contact center is assessed regularly.
- There are regular reviews of ongoing initiatives and exploration of new ways to improve the quality of service.
- Employees are supported and given opportunities to develop.

Culture and values

- Customers are viewed as whole people rather than as sets of discrete questions.
- Resolving customer problems/issues on first contact (FCR) is strongly emphasized.
- The center is mission-focused, and the values and culture are consistent with the mission.
- Accountability is emphasized and valued.
- Employee growth is encouraged.

Goals

- Attention is paid to efficiency in operating the contact center and performing other core tasks (cost-effectiveness).
- Customer satisfaction means making things easy for customers, being available when customers need service, and providing staff with ready access to all information necessary to answer customer questions.
- Employee satisfaction is critical—happy workers are more productive and more likely to exhibit professional behavior.

Technology

- Centers have a robust Customer Relations Management (CRM) system in place and use it in many ways.
- Centers ensure they have a strong, comprehensive, and up-to-date knowledge base (scripts, pattern responses).
- Centers adopt appropriate technologies and implement timely updates.

Process

- The focus is on making customer service easy for customers and on meeting their principal needs—assuring the accuracy and reliability of the information provided.
- Ideal service-level objectives are set—operating metrics for quality assurance.
- Innovation and improvement are pursued on an ongoing basis.
- Skill-based routing is employed to send specific types of calls to the employees with appropriate skills (multi-tiered contact center).
- Interactive voice response systems (IVR), the web, and other self-service options are used as much as possible to eliminate calls that do not need to go to agents.
- The reasons for customer contacts are assessed to determine if process modifications can reduce the number of contacts.
- Teleworking is used to provide flexibility in scheduling of staff to meet customer loads.
- All customer contacts are recorded.

- Customers are surveyed via IVR, web, or other means to get their assessments of center performance and contacts.

People

- The main criterion in hiring staff is a good customer service attitude and skills and a belief in the value the contact center's work.
- Clear behavioral expectations of staff are defined, with specific metrics for the center as a whole and employees, including attendance and behavior (especially with teleworking).
- Staff and center performance are evaluated regularly, with monitoring and performance assessments used as primary tools for quality control.
- Continual professional growth is supported—employees who do not meet behavioral expectations are coached, and all employees get regular training on current service procedures and up-to-date knowledge and skills.
- Performance descriptions demonstrate managers value the employees.
- Employees are encouraged to come up with innovative process improvements and are rewarded for them.
- Outstanding employee performance is rewarded in meaningful monetary and non-monetary ways.

Appendix A. Public Information Office Customer Service Rating Instrument

Interaction Rating Instrument

Date: _____ Communication Reviewed: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

ID:

Topic:

Responsiveness

+1 0 -1

Assurance

+1 0 -1

Tangibles

+1 0 -1

Empathy

+1 0 -1

Reliability

+1 0 -1

Timeliness

+1 0 -1

Overall Rating

+1 0 -1

Caller tenor

Guidelines on Expected Behavior by RATER Element

Responsiveness

- 1 → CO response did NOT address the question(s) being asked OR
CO response did NOT acknowledge/respond in a timely manner
- 0 → CO response addressed the question(s) being asked
- +1 → CO response addressed the question(s) being asked and anticipated follow-ups

- I. Prompt service to customers
- II. Readiness to respond to customers' requests
- III. Willingness to help customers

Notes:

- Telephone contacts are the first priority (2-hour time slot given to each agent for responding to email inquiries)
- Telephone contacts-speed to answer time not to exceed 30 seconds (0:30)
- Email contacts-no more than five (5) working days to respond to emails

Assurance

- 1 → CO response did not sufficiently answer all questions; customer does not have enough information to know what steps to take next; customer follow-up likely
- 0 → CO response sufficiently answered all questions at correct level of detail for customer to know what steps to take next, if needed
- +1 → CO response provides information that leads to a better understanding of copyright law and procedures

- I. Agents instill confidence in customers
- II. Agents make customers feel safe in their transactions
- III. Agents are knowledgeable/have knowledge to answer customer questions

Notes:

- Agents are responsible for the security of submissions (secure deposit copies, fees, and applications in appropriate manner)
- Agents provide detailed replies
- Agents demonstrate initiative, resourcefulness, perseverance, and sound judgment in locating and offering appropriate information

Tangible

- 1 → CO response was NOT easy to read; may NOT be understood by customer (too much jargon)
- 0 → CO response was relatively easy to read and understand
- +1 → CO response was very easy to read and understand

- I. Visually appealing facilities
- II. Agents are neat and have professional appearance/conduct
- III. Visually appealing materials associated with the service
- IV. Convenient business hours

Notes:

- Agents should be prompt and always maintain professional conduct (no inappropriate socializing)
- Agents should behave professionally and consistently demonstrate courtesy, tact, respect, patience, and empathy toward all customers
- Agents always use complete sentences and agent's name or initials are always listed in written correspondence
- Agents use correct grammar and spelling in all written correspondence; all written correspondence is polite, brief, and concise
- Responses do not indicate legal advice or opinion
- The initial inquiry is sent back with the response (written correspondence); for example, an email response from agent should always contain the initial inquiry email from the contact
- If the question/inquiry from the contact is unclear, the agent seeks more information
- When forwarding the service request (via telephone or email) to another Section/staff member, the agent notifies the customer of the forward and to expect a slight delay

Empathy

- 1 → CO response was NOT professional
- 0 → CO response was professional (respectful, courteous, and treated customer as someone important)
- +1 → CO response suggested the agent cared about the customer as an individual and empathized with customer needs (customer invited to email agent back if needed)

- I. The agent gives the customer individualized and personal attention
- II. The agent deals with the customer in a caring fashion
- III. The agent attends to the best interest of the customer

Notes:

- The agent consistently demonstrates effective public relations skills (e.g. patience, tact, flexibility, and courtesy)
- The agent provides quality service (helpfulness, desire to provide accurate information)
- The agent answers inquiries in a polite and respectful manner

Reliability

- 1 → CO response did NOT provide customer feeling that response was reliable OR Answers were different from those received earlier from the CO
- 0 → CO response provided customer feeling that response was accurate/dependable
- +1 → CO response provided customer feeling that response was accurate and anticipated and answered other questions that might arise

- I. The agent delivers services as promised
- II. The agent shows dependability in handling the customer's service problems
- III. The agent performs the services correctly the first time
- IV. The agent provides the services at the promised time
- V. The agent keeps customers Informed about when the services will be performed

Notes:

- The agent demonstrates initiative, resourcefulness, perseverance, and sound judgment in locating and offering appropriate information

All responses to customer should be:

- **Professional**
- **Accurate**
- **Courteous**
- **Timely**

Appendix B. Selected Best Practices from the Literature Review, US Patent and Trademark Office Contact Centers, and Convergys

Best Practices in Contact Centers from the Literature

This compilation of key best practices for contact centers comes from the literature review (see the bibliography in Appendix C). Primary sources used in developing this compilation are Anton and Belfiore (2009); Anton and Gustin (2000); Bergevin, Kinder, Siegel, and Simpson (2010); Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990); and Zemke (2003).

Leadership

- Contact centers, like any organization, are only as good as their leadership, and how management views the contact center has a great deal of influence on its success.
- It is important that leadership express a strong, overt commitment to customer service, is committed to improving it, and provides a behavioral model for employees.
- Leadership should support and develop employees. Leadership should also instill and ethos of accountability.

Culture and Values

- World-class companies see customers as whole persons rather than sets of discrete questions.
- Top contact centers today emphasize resolving customer problems/issues on first contact (first-call resolution, FCR). FCR is the highest correlated metric to customer satisfaction, and Two-plus calls account for 15% of the average annual budget. For every 1% improvement in FCR, there is a 1% improvement in customer satisfaction. Most centers view FCR as the most important metric and make sure that all employees are aware why it is important. Call centers with high employee satisfaction also have high FCR. The call center industry average to resolve a customer's inquiry or problem is 1.4 calls.
- Managers above the supervisor level are held accountable for FCR, and employees receive regular feedback of their FCR performance. A critical element in assessing FCR is the ability to track customers and reasons for contacting the center so as to know when someone calls back about the same matter.

- Frontline agents should feel supported and encouraged. Agents will only be able or willing to change their behavior if they have support and guidance from above in the form of training, coaching, and even revised incentive programs. At the best contact centers, everyone from senior leadership to the classroom trainers is dedicated to the agents' success. Contact centers encourage employee growth.

Goals

- Top companies strive for efficiency and cost-effectiveness in operating contact centers and performing core tasks. They set goals for customer and employee satisfaction.
- To support customer satisfaction, companies aim to make interactions easy for customers, to be available when customers need it, and to have ready access to all information necessary to answer customer questions.
- Employee satisfaction is also an important goal because happy workers are more productive and most likely to be professional.

Contact Center Metrics

Customer-focused.

- Overall customer satisfaction: % in top rating
- % calls resolved on first contact as rated by the customer (FCR)
- World-class FCR rating: 80% or higher (only 5% of the call centers benchmarked by the company SQM are above that rating)
- % additional calls made to achieve resolution (10-15% for world-class call centers in most cases)
- % of accuracy audits that pass
- % of calls that result in a complaint

Operational.

- Agent adherence to work schedule
- Service level/number of inbound [and outbound calls made] per agent per [unit of time]
- Average time in queue
- Average abandonment rate (guideline benchmark = 3-8%; best practice = 3-5%; in many situations a consistent abandoned rate of less than 2% likely indicates low staff utilization)
- Average time before abandoning (time in seconds that the customer waits in the queue from the time the call is answered by the system until abandonment, obtained from the automatic call distributor, ACD)
- Talk time (time spent speaking to customers on inbound calls)
- Average talk time
- Average speed of answer (ASA)
- Amount of time to fully resolve query, including call backs, research or internal calls)
- Average after call work time (time spent after call to complete the case and update the system)
- Percent of calls transferred
- Time the agent is available (amount of time an agent is waiting for a call, although in practice they should be using that time to catch up on reading, emails, etc.)
 - Should be less than 10% (or less in a very large center)
- Time spent on activities other than responding to customers

Technology

- Top contact centers adopt appropriate technologies and implement timely updates that assist their agents in delivering high-quality customer service.

- Top contact centers have Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems that maintain records of all interactions with customers and that can efficiently and effectively track the performance of the agents individually and the contact center as a whole. Agents have access to customer information at the time of each interaction in order to understand the person's relationship and history with the organization. Contact centers make use of the customer database in the CRM system in many ways to improve customer service and support quality assurance.
- Agents have access to an up-to-date, searchable knowledge base of scripts and pattern responses that allow for a consistent, accurate standard of service.

Some major hardware choices to benchmark:

- Automatic call distributor (ACD).
- Voice response unit (VRU).
- Interactive voice response unit (IVR).
- Computer-telephony integration (CTI).
- Predictive dialing.
- Headsets.
- Reader boards.
- Call type screen pop-up (the agent receives a FCR screen pop-up script guideline for resolving the customer's call).
- Call wrap-up resolution (allows agents to capture call resolution outcomes and provide FCR and call resolution reporting).
- Knowledge management (agent uses an online knowledge management tool as a resource to resolve customer calls).
- Virtual hold (when agents are not available, customers can leave a message on a voice menu and they are called back in sequence in which they called).
- Verification self service (for verification or status update, the customer can either go online to get information or receive an email or IVR call providing real-time verification or status update information).

- Knowledge expert availability (agents can rapidly identify knowledge experts' presence and availability to assist in resolving customer issues in real-time).
- Customer Relationship Mgmt (CRM) (agents have access to all customer information).
- Roaming knowledge experts (knowledge experts can assist customer service representatives or customers for resolving calls via presence-based or wireless phone technology).
- Broadcast messaging (use phone and email broadcast messaging to provide customers with information, verification, and status updates).
- Unified agent desktop (reduces the number of applications and makes it easier for the agent to navigate to the appropriate screens to handle the customer's call)
- Live chat (consider in addition to live calls. Most chat solutions offer some level of collaborative browsing, and agents can quickly and easily escalate a troubled chat to a voice call).
 - Chat is often used by a different audience from voice: 8-10% of chat sessions are initiated by a net new audience that has never engaged with a company before, and the audience tends to be younger—between 25-30 years old. Requires agent with specialized typing and writing skills.

Some major software choices to benchmark:

- Automatic number identification (ANI).
- Dialed number identification service (DNIS).
- Computer-assisted telephone (CAT) survey.
- Automated e-mail software response.
- Skill-based routing.
- Agent-monitoring software.

Process

- The best contact centers continuously monitor the impact of their processes on efficiency and effectiveness. They set ideal service-level objectives and operating

metrics for quality assurance based upon services that customers find user-friendly and meet their principal needs, particularly with respect to accuracy and reliability.

- Through analysis of data collected by CRM systems, centers assess customers' reasons for contacts and determine process modifications that can reduce contacts. For instance, increases in calls for certain information or services may lead to the creation of new fields in the CRM or adoption of new scripts by agents. Centers that know which basic information requests are most frequent utilize interactive voice response systems (IVR), the web, and other self-service options to stop calls that do not need to go to agents.
- Centers use skill-based routing to send calls of employees with appropriate skills (multi-tiered contact center).
- Contact centers use teleworking to provide flexibility in scheduling of staff to meet customer loads.

Human Resources

- The primary criterion when hiring agents is good customer service attitude and skills and belief in the value of a contact center's work. People either have or don't have superior customer service attitude and skills; you can't train them to have it. You can train them on specific knowledge and how to apply it.
- Management demonstrates that employees are valued by managers; monitor and assess performance for quality control; reward outstanding employee performance in meaningful ways (monetary and non-monetary); and support continual professional growth.
- Staff have clear performance expectations.
- Contact centers place a premium on training. In addition to training new staff, they periodically train all employees on current service procedures and update their knowledge and skills. They hold regular team meetings and briefings where information and experience is shared and ideas are discussed.
- Staff are encouraged and rewarded for innovative process improvements.

Supervision

- Supervision is not treated as a secondary or as-needed responsibility. First-line supervisors should be spending between 70- 85% of their time on agent

coaching/development. Of this, approximately 20-25% is devoted to agent monitoring. Supervisors do not have time built into their schedule for handling contacts, although they are expected to handle escalated calls and to help with other calls if they have time. (Contact centers identify lack of time as the greatest challenge to regular monitoring).

Monitoring.

- Monitoring results are used as a career development tool to keep agents performing at their best. Most agents see monitoring as a standard part of the contact center environment and believe monitoring and coaching offer positive reinforcement for modifying their behavior to better serve customers. Agents frequently take an active role in discovering what they could have done better.
- For monitoring to be effective, buy-in must begin with the agents themselves, and employees need to understand the company's goals and expectations. Managers should provide clear guidelines on how the results of monitoring are used in performance appraisals.
- Front-line management should be dedicated to agent development, and monitoring is seen as a primary responsibility of supervisors/managers. According to Purdue University data, 85 percent of all contact centers monitor agent-customer interactions. Monitoring and coaching are not treated as "an as available" task—more than 90% of the supervisor's time should be spent with and among the team.
- It is best to have a dedicated quality assurance team whose primary responsibility is to monitor 5-10 contacts for each front-line agent each month to identify skill gaps.
- Agents must receive regular feedback following monitoring to help them achieve optimal performance levels; they should be praised for good work and be helped with coaching and refresher training as needed. Skill deficits are seen as training opportunities, and specific training modules should be available for almost every skill deficit discovered.
- Follow up on the monitoring and feedback by tracking specific behavior changes in the areas needing improvement.
- Today's most advanced contact monitoring systems allow supervisors to monitor telephone calls, email correspondence, and Web chat sessions. Web-enabled monitoring is no more time-consuming than call monitoring, but the criteria are usually different. For example, writing skills are critical in these situations.

- Monitoring should be conducted using
 - Methods that are unobtrusive and non-reactive and that conversations selected for analysis must be representative of all the calls taking place in the center.
 - Some type of rating or scoring sheet with the behavioral and other expectations so that the customer service representative can easily see what areas are satisfactory and what needs improvement, along with recommended training and coaching.

Methods of monitoring include:

- Voice.
- Shadow.
- Side-by-side (the best way to provide agents with immediate feedback).
- Remote listening.
- Third-party monitoring. The outside firm links into the organization's systems, much as its own supervisors do, observes the voice and data screens, and prepares reports. It can be used as an independent verifier to ensure that the internal quality assurance staff is meeting their goals or as the primary quality assurance staff.
- Mystery shopping/test calling.
- Issue escalation monitoring.
- Self-monitoring (agents listen to their calls and score themselves).
- Peer monitoring.
- Exception reporting system (identifies any unusual or unacceptable performance metric such as repeat contacts by customers)
- Customer feedback (positive and negative)

Behavioral expectations.

- Conversational quality.

- Welcome—introduction and tonality.
- Ask—how was information requested.
- Supply—how the information was given and received.
- Empathy and understanding, e.g., courtesy and patience.
- Pace and control
- Call completion.
- Clear and confident use of voice.
- Brand perception—the human touch.
- Key conversational skills.
- Speaking.
- Listening.
- Interpretive understanding.
- Adaptive control.
- Task competence.
- Information competence.
- Communication confidence.
- Emotional competence.
- Personal involvement.
- Politeness.
- Rewardingness.
- Approachability.
- Efficiency.
- Competence.

- Quality and speed of agent responses and listening skills.
- Positive communication.
- Empathy.
- Rapport building.
- Listening skills
- Portrayal of the brand
- Manage customer expectations
- Take ownership of the customer inquiry
- Demonstrate knowledge of procedures
- Accurate typing and spelling
- Accuracy of information provided
- How up-to-date staff are with changes to processes or procedures
- Sources of error, poor performance
- IVR—ease of use and navigation
- Organizations need to be careful of pushing average call time rather than concentrating on behavioral attitudes.

Customer Feedback

- Contact centers see customer feedback as an essential complement to internal quality control, since monitoring alone does not provide insight into how customers feel about their interaction with the contact center. Methods of obtaining customer feedback commonly used are:
 - Mail surveys. This method is suspect due to the inevitable time lag between the contact and receipt of the survey.
 - Automated post-call IVR surveys, either immediately after the contact or within a couple of days, while the customer’s memory of the contact is still

fresh. Automated post-call IVR surveys offer immediacy, but the responses are captured and reported automatically, solely using technology. They may produce confusing results as callers don't always follow directions well.

- Outbound telephone surveys/interviews conducted by a live person. These are the most intrusive, leading to low response rates, are costly, but can permit follow-up questions.
- Web-based surveys.

Highlights from the US Patent and Trademark Office Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance Center and from Convergys

The OP&A study team visited and met with representatives of two contact centers at the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)—the Inventors Assistance Center (IAC) (for patents) and the Trademark Assistance Center (TAC). It also met with a representative of Convergys, a major third-party provider of contact center services that runs centers for a number of federal agencies. Following are some of the key take-away points of relevance to this study.

US Patent and Trademark Office Inventors Assistance Center and Trademark Assistance Center

- Leadership—“You’re only going to be as good as your senior management wants the call center to be. If they want an elite call center, they will give you the resources and funds and training to be that.”
- Structure
 - The Patent side of USPTO uses a three-tier contact center system, with IAC as the 3rd tier. With 2,500 calls a day, it is important to get the callers to the best place for information, and you don’t want to expend the time of highly skilled staff on basic questions. The job of Tier 1 agents is to get the customer’s name, number, and mailing address and fill out a form in the electronic system. Then they try to send the call out to the correct call center. When the system sends the call, it also sends the data.
 - The emphasis in hiring is to find people with good customer service skills because that is not teachable: “You can teach trademark law, but customer service, you either have it or you don’t. We rate that to be highest on the

crediting plan, maybe a 20. Trademark may be just a 15. Use of call center tools may be another 15. We want someone who is familiar with the call customer service environment.”

- Nature of the operation
 - TAC has 25 workstations. Open 8:30 am to 8 pm, it handles snail mail, email, and phone calls and has a walk-in area. It provides information and problem resolution and handles publication requests. TAC gets 500-600 calls a day; the abandonment rate is less than 1%. TAC uses an open queue. There are no alternative work schedules, but all staff can telework ; they work two days in the office and three days at home. There is 100% functionality with the teleworking (“PTO is considered the role model for federal telework”). TAC uses five shifts, with more staff coming on as the mid-west and west workday begins. Staff answer the phones when not otherwise occupied. They use “canned” responses as appropriate. The goal with emails is resolution with the first response. Recently, TAC gathered a team of trademark information specialists, attorney liaisons, managers, and an outside vendor to review its 154 canned solutions. The result was 750 canned solutions that emphasized ease of understanding and minimal jargon. Feedback from customers has been positive. The manager of IAC, which doesn’t use emails, said that he would be okay with canned solutions as long as the email included the canned question that the canned answer addressed. That way, IAC in on the record with how it interpreted the question.
 - IAC is open 8:30 am-5 pm. It provides information related to the highly complicated process of applying for patents. It has 4 workstations, down from 6 because of budget cutback. Almost all IAC’s business is by phone; it uses an open queue. It gets 275 calls a day, or 5,500 a month. Because of the cutback in staff, the average wait time is 5-6 minutes versus a minute and a half before; the manager has seen waits of two and a half hours. The average call lasts five and a half to six minutes, with some running as long as 35/40 minutes. Because written information is legally binding, it does not accept or send information out by email (although acknowledges that it does not get full compliance with this policy). Because IAC uses part-time staff, it has great flexibility in deploying them, and staggers the number of workstations open based on the volume of calls over the day. IAC used to accept voicemails with a guaranteed same-day call back, but abandoned that service when its operation was reduced to four work stations. IAC does not permit teleworking.

- Neither IAC nor TAC has time limits on the duration of calls. That pays off in the long run because the applications are much better: “You handle the call, manage it properly, giving the customer everything they need. The goal is to facilitate their filing the application or to give them the knowledge to decide whether to do so.”
- Staffing
 - After trying contract staff and experiencing a high turnover that reduced the quality of service, TAC moved to federal employees. It has a 25-seat call center.
 - IAC experimented with various approaches and now uses retired part-time patent examiners and other experts such as former judges, who are hired and managed by a contractor. These staff are paid at a GS 15 level because they are highly knowledgeable and experienced—“the elite of the elite.”
- Technology
 - A single 1-800 number with automated routing based on the prompts a caller selects, e.g., patent or trademark information. Pressing zero takes the caller to the USPTO-wide first tier call center. When the caller is transferred, there is some initial recorded information (e.g., a reminder about the information on the website and a suggestion that the caller use it first and then call back with remaining questions, general information on the hours of operation, and how to reach an operator), and then the call goes into a queue. Although the contact center telephone system has the ability to alert customers to the wait time, it is not used.
 - TAC uses a very sophisticated Siebel CRM system integrated with Interactive Client. It includes total call recording with easy retrieval and is able to maintain very comprehensive database on all calls. “When a person calls, it brings up the history of their business. It can tell you anything you want to know about the call—where it came from, to caller ID to when you called last, how long your call was, who you spoke to, what we sent you out, how long you were on hold.” If a call is transferred, that history goes with the transfer. In the near future emails will be integrated into the history, with copies automatically going into the file. A large plasma screen in the work area displays key quantitative information related to service levels so that the tasks can be adjusted as needed.

- Quality assurance
 - TAC describes its quality assurance program as “phenomenal.” It has invested a lot in improving it in the last two years, including through technology and the UCCMS program available through the Siebel CRM/Interactive Client system.
 - Clear service level standards. IAC performance expectations and targets are spelled out in the contract; all contract staff have the same standards and expectations. IAC expects 92% of calls to be answered (it exceeds that), and 80% to be answered within 20 seconds. Since staff were cut back, wait times average 5-6 minutes. TAC has a target of 92% of calls answered, with 80% to be answered within 20 seconds. The standard for email responses is 2-3 business days. If an email is forwarded to someone else for assistance, the agent alerts the customer. Standards and expectations are clearly spelled out in the government position descriptions and performance plans. They include things like level of complaints and information disseminated accurately and efficiently.
 - TAC has extensive training. New hires’ training now takes 6 months, down from a year. When a person is hired, he/she is paired up with a peer mentor. Every fiscal year there is quarterly refresher training: “We recycle them through so that if anything changes, everyone is on the same page, and they get the same information at the same time.” Both IAC and TAC have very large and sophisticated training manuals, with modules for particular aspects of the work.
 - Supervision. All calls are recorded and all emails archived. “If we get a complaint call about an agent, we can go back and listen to it. Often the issue is that the person didn’t get the answer he wanted.” Almost every case has been resolved to TAC’s favor.
 - TAC supervises staff closely, including through two team leaders who do not have supervisory authority. The manager spends 85% of her time running the center. At IAC, the contractor carries out the monitoring and analysis. The IAC manager does look at average call times from the same perspective that TAC does. The manager estimates that he spends less than 1% of his time on IAC (he is also a manager of another office).
 - Monitoring. TAC monitors the quantitative statistics, including average call handle, even though there is no duration target. “We do look at average call

handle time from the perspective of, if the ACH is 4 minutes and 30 seconds, and we have an agent who has ACH of 7 minutes, then that is a red flag, and then the manager and lead will sit with the agent and try to understand why it's taking longer to answer the calls. Usually it's a training issue." IAC does not monitor agents because of their level of knowledge and expertise, although the manager has the capability. A trigger for him that something might be wrong is if no one comes to him with questions; then he is concerned about complacency. He facilitates questions by having the staff lunch table outside his office.

- Customer feedback. Neither IAC nor TAC surveys customers for feedback. Their reasons are that the response rate is too low to be useful, and the respondents are biased toward customers with negative attitudes because they did not get the answer they wanted. In addition, respondents interpret questions differently, and senior management often doesn't know how to interpret the results. In 2007 TAC conducted mystery shopping, because of complaints it received from customers saying they received misinformation. It found out that was occurring.
- TAC has a very sophisticated data collection and analysis program used for quality assurance monitoring and to forecast staffing and other resource needs.

Convergys

Convergys describes itself one of the top three call centers in the country. It handles about 4,000 seats in government call centers.

Imperatives for exemplary contact centers.

- Customer satisfaction
 - What the customer most wants is getting the right information within a reasonable amount of time that the center adheres to. Customers are willing to wait as long as the center meets those two criteria. But don't confuse wait times and customer satisfaction. Customers who hold for 10 minutes may not be happy.
 - Quality of service—the actual interaction with the person. Was the agent friendly, helpful? Did he or she express a desire to help the customer? Was the answer correct and the best answer possible?

- One-stop shopping, defined as including transfers, is best practice. It is best for the customer and for the center—it saves money, makes for the easiest workflow, etc.
- The number one item is hiring the person with the right attitude because customer service is about attitude.
- The number two item is training.
- A robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool is the backbone of a successful contact center. CRM has three functions: it captures information about the customer; it manages or provides a structure for managing the workflow; and it provides the knowledge base of processes and procedures to be used and the correct responses to inquiries. It's what turns a group of people who answer calls into an actual contact center.
 - It provides the center with the critical capability to know who has called: it captures the person's name, telephone number, one or two identifying pieces of data, and a real address for mailing.
 - It collects and maintains notes and histories of customers' calls, which can shorten call times.
 - It allows assessment of why people call, the processes and procedures that result in calls, and other causes of complaints. Optimally, these data are compared to customer survey responses. That is the best foundation for improving quality.
 - It offers total call recording so that supervisors can retrieve a call to look into a customer complaint and use the call as a learning opportunity for the agent.
 - Great contact centers use a knowledge base for responding to calls. This is a paradigm shift from emphasizing subject matter expertise. The center invests in written documented answers, SOPs, etc. that are held in a searchable database. The center can then hire lower level, less experienced people to answer the questions. The investment goes into making agents experts in using the knowledge base to provide answers. It also puts the focus on providing consistent answers.
- Surveying customers to get their feedback is essential.

- The response rate depends to some extent on the customer—it is higher with government agencies than commercial companies, probably 15-20% response rates.
- Survey results show a little bias on both ends—customers click either because they had a great experience or a bad one—but the responses still offer a pretty even spectrum.
- Limit the survey questions to no more than a dozen.
- Begin with questions soliciting feedback on satisfaction with the center as a whole, and then focus on the interaction with the agent.
- Follow up with dissatisfied customers, including by having management contact them.
- What increases the costs of surveys are the analytics that go around it, but those are critical.
- In terms of survey delivery methods,
 - The best approach is to ask customers for an email address and then send the survey. The advantage is that customers can complete the survey when they feel like it.
 - In-person outbound calling is good, but costs more; an automated IVR can also be used. The disadvantage of phone surveys is that they may not get the customer at a good time, whether they are contacted at the end of the call or later.
 - Sometimes Convergys calls customers for a short period to see how that correlates with the web-based survey, and then implements that survey.

Other points.

- Tiered contact centers are effective. A tier one center provides general customer service and should be able to answer 80% of the calls. If it can't, something is wrong. The upper-level tiers are used for calls requiring specialized knowledge and problem/escalated calls.

- Service level or grade of service—essentially how long people have to wait to get an agent, measured in percent of calls answered in a period of time or the average speed of answer—is used to drive decisions on level of staffing and infrastructure. Sensitivity analysis shows that customers don't notice the difference between a 10- and a 30-second hold and rarely is their satisfaction negatively impacted by having to hold for a minute or two. In commercial companies, customers start to abandon the call at the minute and a half to two minute mark. But it depends what the person is holding for—they will hold indefinitely for health care-related calls, for example—and on whether they are a captive audience.
- Most Convergys clients have 1-800 number.
- Rather than have people wait, offer the option of leaving a telephone number for a call back—but make sure it is timely.
- Customers expect to be told how long the wait time is, but it doesn't affect their decision whether or not to wait.
- Referring people to call on another day or time of day is common practice.
- Opening a customer call with a greeting is a good practice. The people who don't care won't mind if that happens, whereas the people who do care will mind if it doesn't happen.
- Offer staff whatever non-monetary and monetary incentives you can.
- Behind the scenes is an efficiency measure—am I doing this in a cost-effective way? Average handle time is key—how long the average agent spends on the average phone call or email. Look at the times for the fastest half of the staff for benchmarking, and try to get the others down to that.
- One reason government agencies use vendors is to have greater flexibility to adjust staffing and to offer rewards and incentives for employees.
- Every government agency has citizen satisfaction as a primary goal. It's driven at the senior management level, especially if it's on their scorecards. Senior management sets a target for customer satisfaction that gets passed down to lower-level managers. The metric usually comes from a benchmark survey. Often supervisors are evaluated on their team's average score. If quality monitoring is aligned with customer satisfaction, agents who show good quality in internal monitoring should also have satisfied customers, and shows up in their individual quality scores.

Appendix C. Pilot Customer Feedback Survey Instrument

IRD Copyright Office Customer Satisfaction

You recently contacted the United States Copyright Office. Copyright's Information and Records Division contains the Public Information Office and the Records Research and Certification Section.

The Information and Records Division is committed to delivering the best possible service to customers, and would appreciate your taking a few minutes to answer the following questions. Please tell us how well we did in serving you.

Answering these questions is completely voluntary and is not linked to your business with the Public Information Office or the Records Research and Certification Section.

If you have any questions about this customer satisfaction survey, please call David Christopher, Acting Chief, Information & Records Division, at 202.707.8825 or send him an email at dchr@loc.gov.

Click on the "Continue" button when you are ready to go to the next screen.

When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, did you contact the Public Information Office or the Records Research and Certification Section? (Mark all that apply.)

- Public Information Office
- Records Research and Certification Section
- Neither

If **Neither** Is Selected, Then Skip To **End of Survey**

Display This Question:

If When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office Is Selected**

And When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Selected**

Even though you transacted business with both the Public Information Office and the Records Research and Certification Section, we would appreciate it if you would evaluate your experience with only one of the two Copyright units.

Are you evaluating the Public Information Office or the Registration Research and Certification Division?

- Public Information Office
- Records Research and Certification Section

How often do you do business with this Copyright Office unit during a normal year? (Mark only one answer)

- Never
- It was my first time
- 1 to 5 times
- 6 to 12 times
- 13 to 24 times
- 25 or more times

How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recently (today or your last contact)? (Mark only one answer.)

- Telephone
- Email
- Postal mail
- Walked in
- Fax
- Other

Where did you obtain information on how to contact this Copyright Office unit ? (Mark all that apply.)

- Copyright Office website
- Local library
- Web search (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.)
- 411 or information operator
- Other

In your most recent business with this Copyright Office unit , which of the following describes you? (Mark only one answer.)

- Creator (Author, musician, artist, etc.)
- Legal professional
- Publishing professional
- Authorized agent
- Potential user of a copyrighted work
- Other

Display This Question:

If Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Public Information Office Is Selected**

Or When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office Is Selected**

And When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Not Selected**

Why did you contact the Public Information Office most recently? (Mark all that apply.)

- Because I could not find information on the Copyright Office website
- I could not understand the language and information on the Copyright Office website
- To follow up on communication from the Copyright Office
- To correct error in a Copyright Office communication
- To register a claim to copyright for a new work
- To obtain information on how to register a copyright
- To check on status of my registration claim
- To obtain information on copyright fees
- To check registration status of someone else's copyright
- Other

Display This Question:

If Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Selected**

Or When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Selected**

And When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office Is Not Selected**

Why did you contact the Records Research and Certification Section most recently? (Mark all that apply.)

- To obtain a certified copy of my copyright registration
- To conduct a search of Copyright registrations
- To follow up on communication from the Copyright Office
- To correct error in a Copyright Office communication
- To pay for a service provided by the Registration Research and Certification Division
- To obtain information on conducting registration search
- To obtain information on getting a certified copy on my registration certification
- Other

Overall, how do you feel about your experience with this Copyright Office unit ?

- Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied Delighted

Display This Question:

If How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Walked in** Is **Selected**

Or How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Telephone** Is **Selected**

Did you have to wait what you considered an unreasonable amount of time before a representative started to talk with you?

- Not applicable Unreasonable time Reasonable time

Display This Question:

If Did you have to wait what you considered an unreasonable ... **Unreasonable time** Is **Selected**

About how long did you have to wait?

- Less than a minute 1 to 3 minutes 4 or 5 minutes 5 to 10 minutes 10 to 15 minutes
 More than 15 minutes

Did you have to wait what you considered an unreasonable amount of time before a representative was able to assist you?

- Not applicable Unreasonable time Reasonable time

Display This Question:

If Did you have to wait what you considered an unreasonable ... **Unreasonable time** Is **Selected**

And How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Walked in** Is **Selected**

Or How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Telephone** Is **Selected**

About how long did you have to wait?

- Less than a minute 1 to 3 minutes 4 or 5 minutes 5 to 10 minutes 10 to 15 minutes
 More than 15 minutes

Display This Question:

If Did you have to wait what you considered an unreasonable ... **Unreasonable time** Is **Selected**

And How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Walked in** Is **Not Selected**

And How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Telephone** Is **Not Selected**

About how long did you have to wait? (Please explain. The text box will expand as necessary)

Display This Question:

If How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Telephone** Is **Selected**

Was the telephone message detailing which number to push to reach different Copyright Office services difficult or easy to understand and navigate?

Very difficult Difficult Easy Very easy

Display This Question:

If How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Walked in** Is **Selected**

How did you feel about the cleanliness, comfort, and layout of this Copyright Office unit's physical facilities?

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied Delighted

Display This Question:

If How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Walked in** Is **Selected**

And Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Records Research and Certification Section** Is **Selected**

Or When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section** Is **Selected**

How did you feel about quality and maintenance of Records Research and Certification Section's equipment for public access to records, copying, printing, etc.?

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied Delighted

Were you treated with respect and courtesy?

Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Was the Copyright Office unit's communication with you (letter, email, telephone, or in person) easy to understand and useful?

Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Was the Copyright Office unit responsive in answering your questions?

- Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Did you feel that the Copyright Office unit's representative cared about you as an individual rather than a number?

- Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Was the Copyright Office unit's representative sensitive to your needs?

- Not at all Somewhat Mostly Completely

Did the Copyright Office unit's representative treat your questions as important?

- Not important at all Not very important Moderately important Very important

How did you feel about the accuracy and reliability of the information you received?

- Very dissatisfied Somewhat dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied Delighted

Were your questions handled in a professional manner?

- Never Some were Most were All were

Display This Question:

If When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office** Is Selected

Or Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Public Information Office** Is Selected

How often did the answers conflict with answers that you may have received earlier from the Copyright Office website, Public Information Office, or other Copyright Office representatives?

- Not Applicable Never Sometimes Most of the time All of the time

Display This Question:

If How often did the answers conflict with answers that you ... **Sometimes** Is Selected

Or How often did the answers conflict with answers that you ... **Most of the time** Is Selected

Or How often did the answers conflict with answers that you ... **All of the time** Is Selected

Please explain.

Display This Question:

If When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office Is Selected**

And When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Not Selected**

Or Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Public Information Office Is Selected**

Would you recommend the Public Information Office to friends or colleagues as a good way to handle questions about Copyright Office services or basic questions about copyright?

- Very unlikely Somewhat unlikely Not sure Likely Definitely

Display This Question:

If When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Selected**

And When you contacted the United States Copyright Office, di... **Public Information Office Is Not Selected**

Or Even though you transacted business with both the Public ... **Records Research and Certification Section Is Selected**

How good was the value of the service provided by the Records Research and Certification Section considering the fees charged?

- Excellent Good Fair Poor Not applicable

Display This Question:

If How did you contact this Copyright Office unit most recen... **Telephone Is Selected**

And Why did you contact the Public Information Office most re... **To check on status of my registration claim Is Selected**

If you had had a Copyright Claim Service Record number, would you have used Copyright's website to find out the status of your claim rather than calling the Public Information Office?

- Definitely would use the website if possible
 Probably would use the website if possible
 Would prefer to call the Public Information Office by telephone
 Not sure

How could this Copyright Office unit improve its customer service? (The box will expand as needed.)

Thank you for helping us improve the services of the Information and Records Division of the U. S. Copyright Office.

If you have any issues you would like to discuss, please call David Christopher, Acting Chief, Information & Records Division, at 202.707.8825 or send him an email at dchr@loc.gov.

If you would like a Copyright Office agent to contact you about any issues related to your recent contact, please leave your name and telephone number, email, or address.

Name

Telephone Number

Email Address

Postal Address

Appendix D. Bibliography of Literature Reviewed for Contact Center Best Practices

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