

The Tele-Tech Services Quality Story, Part II *Focus on the Big Q Results, and No More “Bad Months”*

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“You just need to be driven by the *Big Q*.”

That’s it – that’s the 2004 statement made by data quality guru Dr. Tom Redman that set us on course to ensure our customers receive the highest quality data in the telecom industry. The quest for the *Big Q* defined our destiny – well, okay, maybe that’s a bit dramatic. But we were up to the challenge, even if it meant navigating uncharted waters, charting a new course, exploring undiscovered terrain -- *are we getting carried away again?* – well, even if we weren’t quite sure of the road ahead, we were definitely determined to let the *Big Q* drive us.

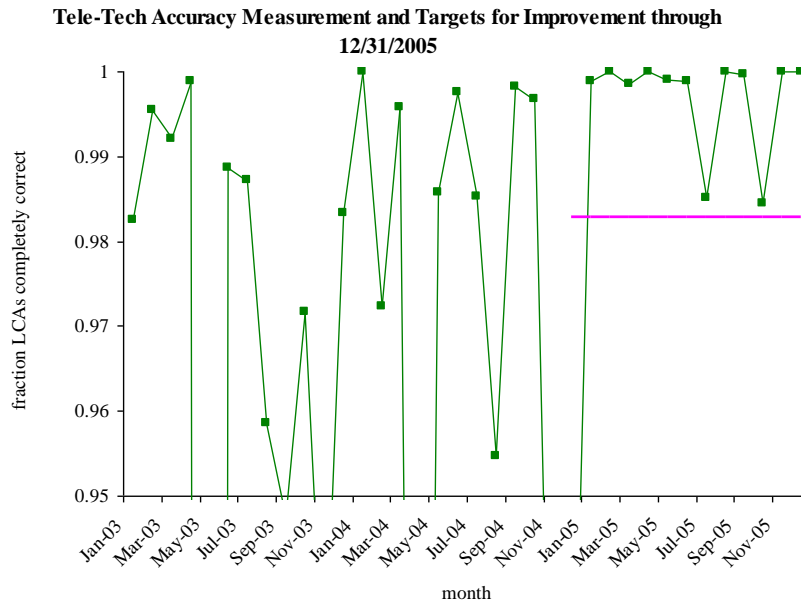
We were on a mission – a mission from the guru of data quality – to prove our data accuracy to our customers – and to ourselves! With our quality goal in mind, 2005 became a turning point for data quality measurement in telecom.

But wait! Being driven by the *Big Q* is not necessarily a measurable goal. How would we know when we arrived at our target? Would there be a big sign saying, “Welcome, you have reached your destination!” - probably not. We determined the journey would be long, and the best way to ensure we were on the right path would be to set a series of short-term goals, letting the *Big Q* be our driving force. So in 2005, we set (and met) a goal of eliminating “bad months”. And, if you’re new to our little story, “bad months” aren’t those with short Saturdays – or terrible Tuesdays. To define “bad months”, I’ll skip back to 2004 for a moment. When we started measuring our accuracy in a statistically valid way and charting the results, we noticed a definite unsettling pattern. Roughly two times per year, our accuracy took a brief nose-dive, and then recovered. The nose-dives became identified as “bad months”.

And, while our mission was to set an accuracy percentage goal, it became evident that these wild fluctuations in our accuracy were something that needed to be controlled first. Eliminating those misbehaving “bad months” became our focused goal for 2005.

The first step was to ensure valid statistical representation of our accuracy. See Part I of our Quality Story for all the fascinating behind-the-scene statistical representation details (really) – but the highlight is that we started measuring the number of customer reported errors made in a given month against the number of files changed or investigated for change during that month.

The result of this improved tracking - and changes in procedure look like this:



Not a bad picture (said with the utmost modesty)! Quite simply, we eliminated “bad months” by looking for and identifying the root cause; then, finding and implementing ways to modify procedures or systems to prevent reoccurrence.

Now, they say imitation is the best form of flattery – so, when we noticed other vendors publishing their own version of “quality” stats, we were flattered. But – funny thing, we picked up on the fact that no one else seemed to publish their stats for long. And, we also noticed that people can get awfully complex and come up with secret formulas to quantify quality. Hey, the way we look at it is, Tele-Tech’s parent company is KFR – not KFC – we’re not trying to recreate the Colonel’s secret recipe.

We know that quality equates to accuracy, because every year since 1994 we’ve polled our clients, and they tell us accuracy is most important factor - bar none. To us, exceptional customer service is a given – so we don’t factor that into our recipe for quality (but some other vendors do!). So, while others seem to spend a whole lot of time coming up with some complicated formula for what actually comprises quality – and then how to track it; call us simple, we’ve only got one ingredient to our quality recipe – accuracy. We like keeping our focus clear – the end result is usually better.

So, as we accomplished our 2005 goal of *no wire hangers* – wait, that’s another story – no bad months, we began to focus on making our accuracy even better. For perspective, in 2005, with

no bad months, our accuracy rating was 99.974%. This equates to about 8 errors found the entire year. Now, we're high achievers – so, cutting the 2005-error rate in half became our goal for 2006. Yep, our lofty goal for 2006 was to release just 4-erred files to customers across a database of approximately 40,000 files, ending the year with an accuracy rate of 99.987%. And, being driven by the *Big Q*, we buckled up and went for it; now, the ride was fun, but we came a tad short of crossing that finish line, coming in at 99.982% (*so close we could taste it!*).

You know what *they say*... “try, try again”. Well, we did just that in 2007 – but we finished the year in exactly the same place (close but no cigar).

As we entered 2008, we were on a mission – and, okay – maybe a little spooked by something that kept rolling around in our collective head (you should see that head!), anyway, you know how *they say*... “if you keep doing what you're doing, you'll keep getting what you're getting”. So, we decided to up our game. We increased 2008's accuracy goal to 99.99%. And, guess what – you guessed it: goal set – goal met!

While there's probably a more reserved, dignified way to say... *WOOO HOOO we did it(!!!)* – we kind of enjoyed the happy dancing in the halls and celebratory chanting of, as *they say*, “now that's what I'm talking about!”.

Now – where do we go from here ... how do we carry this level of accuracy through year after year (and not reduce our employees to twitching accuracy addicts)? Well, there are some obvious internal tweaks that we identified – such as custom software changes that make it impossible for certain types of errors to be repeated. And – then there's the Zen-thing – you know the holistic approach. From 2005 through 2008, we worked with such synchronization, as the “little engine that could”, and we learned some valuable lessons that became part of our company culture.

A top-down approach works best. Now, we admit – the fact that we're a small family-owned business worked in our favor on this one. But being able to show the value of our accuracy quest – through increased sales and customer retention – most certainly gained the support of the management team around here. And – having the top dogs all barking the same tune certainly enhances our company culture of quality – and allows us to continue the quest.

We believe that maintaining our culture of quality takes company-wide focus as well. We need to continue working as that “little engine that could” and we've done a number of things – from goals to incentives - to help keep this focus.

Full examination! Any errors that are found by customers are fully examined. We don't hide from our mistakes – we put them under the spotlight and take the opportunity to dissect what happened. And, more importantly, to find out who is responsible so we can

put them under a swinging spotlight and chant “we have ways of making you talk”. Not really – we usually just play Shirley Temple tunes into special employee earphones for an hour or two – they typically snap right back into shape. Okay, okay – so maybe the swinging spotlight and twisted pleasure of Temple tunes is only in our heads; but, we do fully believe examining errors is our best teacher in allowing us to determine how the error happened -- and, how to adjust our processes and/or software so that the same type of error cannot happen again.

Communication is critical! Oh yea – we’re warm and fuzzy folks about our quality. Remember we mentioned wanting to prevent our employees from being reduced to twitching accuracy addicts? Well, we came up with our own 12-step program to continuously communicate our accuracy mantra to our little band of data-holics.

Our Serenity Prayer:

Dear (Insert your higher power of choice), Grant me the serenity to accept data that does not need to be changed, the courage to change data that needs to be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Our 12-Step Program:

1. Do it once
2. Do it right
3. Check it twice
4. Automate where possible
5. Reward excellence
6. Make successful processes repeatable
7. Apply successful concepts company-wide
8. Invest in continual training to enhance and upgrade skills
9. Instill an atmosphere of understanding the "why" behind the "what"
10. Stimulate a mindset that allows us to think beyond the action plan
11. Create a continually positive customer experience
12. Maintain best practices through an on going review of processes

Have fun with what you’ve done! It’s amazing how much a little laughter can do! Working with such a focus on accuracy can be a bit demanding – but being able to find the levity in a situation – or to enjoy your teammates and your work environment makes a huge difference. We recognize that – and we try to encourage a sense of fun in what we accomplish together. A little bit of fun generally helps everyone!

We’re not trying to be braggarts – but we sure go to extra efforts to keep our current and prospective customers up-to-date on just how accurate we are. We publish our stats on our website and update them monthly. We also share milestones in our quality program via our

newsletter. And, personally, one of the first things I mention to prospective customers is our current accuracy statistic. Oh, and - most people aren't put off by the flashing "Ask me about my stats!" buttons our staff wear on their off time – employees just love wearing those!

And, we're not the only ones talking about our stats! Our customers notice.

"I was skimming your 'Quality Story' and it struck me that we actually lived through your rise to a level of quality that quieted our most fervent critics. If you recall, not so long ago we had senior managers calling for your rates to be slashed because the perception was that your data was full of holes. We systematically (or should I say, your organization) researched, checked and double-...until we knew it was right. Before I left there were folks saying to me how the price of your data was worth it because the 'Quality' and 'Service' was unparalleled. I want to once again say THANK YOU."

So – in summing up our Quality story, if you recall from Part I (*which, by the way, is a must read, so if you missed it, be sure to check it out!*), this little journey - born out of bravado in my zest to find a way to provide customers a data quality guarantee - resulted in a revolution of sorts! That's right, tremendous transformation took place in terms of evaluating, measuring and presenting data quality. In fact, we discovered that actually measuring data quality was unique among the few companies that do what we do; and, then, making the accuracy statistic public was downright daring! During our discovery process, we have recognized ourselves as quite the trailblazers – with a little bit of exhibitionist inside. Don't let the pocket protectors fool you, we continue to flash our stats proudly!

And, in the end, it became clear to me that what sparked this whole exploration – the quest to find a data quality guarantee – was actually a sub-point of what I really wanted, not the actual focus. *Oh self-discovery is so fulfilling!* What I really wanted was a way to build our credibility and prove that our data is accurate. And, with a systematic approach, stringent measurements, as well as open and honest reporting of progress, I got what I wanted. I love when that happens!

The End

That's all to this little story, folks. But, not to worry, the *Big Q* is still in the driver's seat – and we're determined to continue discovering new terrain! We'll be tracking our data quality progress on our web site, and you've got a passenger-side vicarious view anytime you want at www.telecomdb.com/quality.

Follow our progress! Check our monthly stats updates at <http://www.telecomdb.com>.