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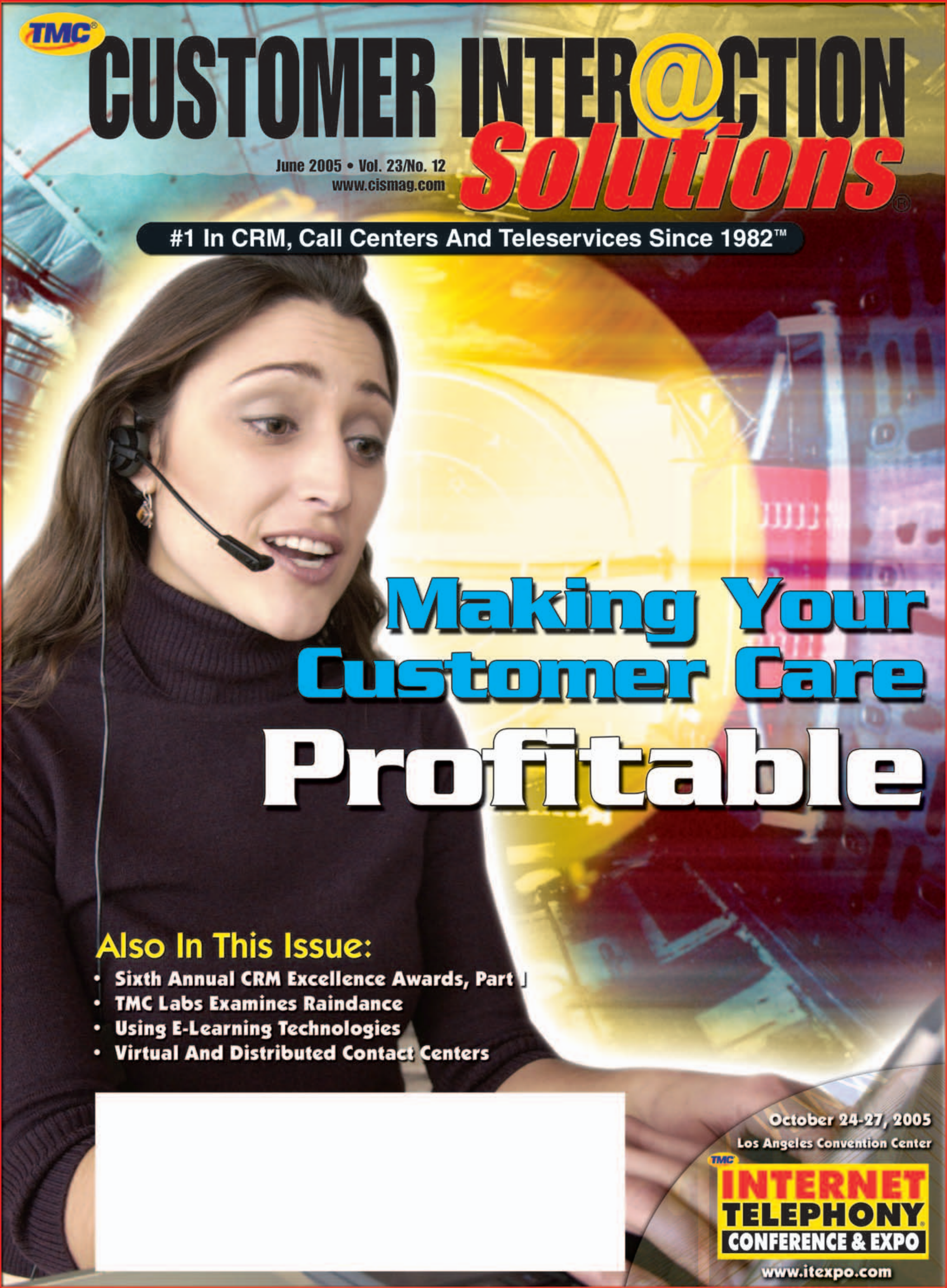

Making Your Customer Care Profitable

Also In This Issue:

- Sixth Annual CRM Excellence Awards, Part I
- TMC Labs Examines Raindance
- Using E-Learning Technologies
- Virtual And Distributed Contact Centers

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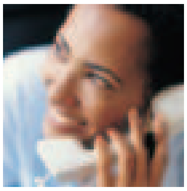

By: Nadji Tehrani,
Executive Group Publisher,
Technology Marketing Corporation

Taking CRM To The Next Level…

Making Your Customer Care Profitable

The Essence Of Appropriately Conducted CRM Should Be Customer Care

By far and away, the primary focus of savvy contact center/CRM executives is "**customer care.**" For without customer care, there is no customer to manage by CRM.

In this particular editorial, we would like to discuss the methods and processes by which management can convert a CRM/customer care center into a profit center.

Traditionally, customer service centers have always been regarded as cost centers. In the 80s, when this publication was launched, customer care was not as important and vital as it is today. Back then, believe it or not, many vendors even refused to obtain 800 numbers by which to welcome customer input and provide customer service. I recall many shortsighted business people saying, "Why should I pay for the phone call to encourage my customers' complaints?" That shortsighted approach cost the misguided vendors a ton of business. Slowly and gradually, the customer got the respect that he or she richly deserved; namely, outstanding customer service became **THE** source of customer satisfaction without which no company could exist. As I have stated in several of these editorials in the past, companies live or die from repeat business. That is, without an outstanding customer care strategy, no company can exist profitably.

Always remember that it costs 10 times more to get a new customer than to service an existing one properly.

Taking Your Customer Care Program To A Profit Center

Believe it or not, I addressed this topic back in the mid-80s in this, our flagship publication, then called *Telemarketing®* magazine.

Not only did we cover this topic editorially in this publication, but I also frequently included it in the conference programs of our industry's leading trade show in the 80s and 90s, which was called Telemarketing and Business Telecommunications™ (TBT). Yes, this was indeed the hot topic back then, and it is a very hot topic even now. The difference is that now, customer care and CRM are backed by sophisticated technology. Today, it has become a very complex project. Among other things, in order to prepare for conversion of customer care centers to profit centers, one would have to develop a functional and practical strategy for the following steps:

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1. **First and foremost, you need to build, nurture and reinforce relationships with all of your customers.** If your company does not have what it takes to manage relationship building with all of your accounts, then at the very least, I suggest that you focus on the 20 percent of the customers that give you 80 percent of your business.

Building a relationship with a customer requires monthly, if not weekly, contact with the account, always offering a helpful idea by which your customer can run his or her business more effectively and/or more profitably. You really need to make a living in providing unparalleled and genuine service to your customers if you truly want the relationship to continue. Always remember that it costs 10 times more to get a new customer than to service an existing one properly.

2. **Management must have the willingness and open mind to act on feedback.** Many companies, unfortunately, do not like to receive customer feedback. They simply offer an off-the-shelf product and tell their customers to take it or leave it. Obviously, in today's business environment, there is absolutely, positively no room for companies that think that way. Quite possibly, the company in question won't be around for a long time.

I learned a long time ago that a mind is like a parachute, it only works when it's open. Consequently, the successful businesses of tomorrow are those in which everyone at the company has a **positive, can-do and flexible attitude**. Anything short of that would be a disaster.

3. **Conduct focus groups.** Frequent focus groups with your customers are extremely useful to help you keep your customers satisfied. Traditionally, focus groups unveil problems with a company's product or service and, more importantly, such groups generate new ideas that can help the company to solve the deficiencies of the product and thereby ensure business continuation via customer satisfaction.

4. **Training is the key.** Obviously, in order to convert the customer care center to a profit center, one has to focus on the training of the CSRs (customer service representatives). **This neglected group of people is the first contact with your customers and it is where perceptions are formed. And remember: One never gets a second chance to make a good first impression.** Accordingly, before you even think of appropriate customer care, you must first think about outstanding — and I mean outstanding — employee care. If anyone at your company is not treated appropriately, particularly your frontline people such as customer service representatives, the dissatisfaction will come through their contact with your customers and that could spell disaster in your CRM activity.

As I have stated in numerous editorials, every company talks about customer care and customer satisfaction but no company that I know, with a few exceptions, talks about employee care and employee satisfaction.

A Success Story From Telerx

Approximately one month ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Telerx (http://www.telerx.com) and had the privilege of meeting Nancy Gussow

Congratulations To The CRM Excellence Award Winners

In this issue, our editors have announced the winners of the prestigious CRM Excellence Awards, Part I.

If one was asked to define the essence of CRM in two words, then one would have to say "**customer care**." If four words were used, one would have to say "**customer care par excellence**." The winners of TMC's 2005 CRM Excellence Awards have distinguished themselves by offering proven products and services for successful CRM and customer care applications. On behalf of the CRM/customer interaction industry and the editorial staff of *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*® magazine, the industry's preeminent publication since 1982, I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to all of the winners. Following is a list of the 2005 CRM Excellence Award winners. (Please see the complete company descriptions and list of products and services on page 50.)

The following companies have earned the 2005 CRM Excellence Award:

Aplicor
Best Software
Citrix Online
ClientLogic
Cross Country Automotive Services
Eagle IP LLC
Empirix, Inc.
Epicor
eTelecare Global Solutions
IEX
KANA
Maximizer Software
MEDFONE, Inc.
Proficient Systems Inc.
salesforce.com
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Making Your Customer Care Profitable: A Different Perspective

By Robert Mattson, Director of Product Marketing, Performix Technologies

The process of changing contact care from a cost to profit center involves a change of goals, processes and culture. Setting new goals and modifying processes can sometimes be accomplished over the course of weeks, but changing your organization's culture to one that supports and rewards profit-driving behaviors can take months or even years. Often, organizations underestimate the level of effort needed to "keep the ball rolling" over the duration of the change process. Without constant monitoring and course correction, the best plans will fizzle out or veer off in the wrong direction.

The process of properly targeting, training and monitoring employees is fairly simple, but far from easy. Maintaining visibility, distilling information and making the right decisions that support changing an existing culture is a major undertaking. Many organizations make the mistake of attempting to take on this challenge with no purpose-built automation, creating more manual work, while not efficiently deriving benefits. Software doesn't sleep, and when attempting to divert the path of a river of habits and old behaviors, you need to apply constant effort.

Changing From Cost Goals To Profit Goals

While the primary goal of creating a profit center is simple, transferring those goals down to actionable activities and then ensuring that those goals are completed can become a day-to-day management nightmare. If the primary goal is to increase sales through cross-selling, what are the elements that must be in place for the agent to be successful? The client must be satisfied with the organization at every level to continue the relationship with the vendor. The agent must know the client's needs and be sufficiently familiar with its products and services to suggest the correct item to meet the client's needs. Finally, the agent must have the right skills to sell and incentives to put forth sufficient effort.

Simple, right? It is when all the parts are in place; but what about when the client isn't happy because he or she has been on hold for 15 minutes, or the agent has been told that each call should be no more than four minutes in length, so he or she doesn't have the time to complete the sale? Or the agent doesn't have the product knowledge or skills to make the sale? If any of these situations exist, then the simple goal of selling a new widget or extension to an existing service plan has little chance of success. The question is, do you even know what problems exist and what to do to fix them? Should you increase call duration targets to enable the agent to close more business? Keep in mind that this decision could increase hold times and therefore meet profit goals, but lower customer satisfaction. What you need is a way to change goal weightings and priorities, then monitor how they affect key performance indicators.

The main issue is the data that track all of these issues are stored in different systems, such as ACDs, workforce management and quality management, and there is no way to see the relationships between average hold times, customer

Gross, Vice President of Corporate Communica-tions at that company.

The purpose of my visit was to find out how this company is transforming customer care from a cost center into a revenue generator by combining outstanding service with solution-based selling. Indeed, I was extremely impressed to learn that Telerx has actually been able to increase the revenues of a durable goods manufacturer by an average of 20 percent per order compared to the prior year. In addition, the company was able to achieve a 90-percent customer satisfaction rate, a significant increase in product satisfaction. Just as importantly, during the first quarter of integrating a sales component into the customer care program, the increase in contact center-generated revenue exceeded an ambitious goal of 20 percent. Following is some additional information about how Telerx was able to achieve the above objective of profitability.

Background

A manufacturer of food storage products and small electric kitchen appliances had experienced phenomenal growth selling the product and accessories directly, via the Web, toll-free numbers and retail outlets since its introduction in 1987. The company's premier product is a category market leader.

Early on, the company realized the important role its customer care program played in the success of its brand.

Recognizing that each contact is an opportunity to build — or risk — lifelong relationships with customers, the company began to search for a customer care partner. Requirements included the expertise and experience to develop a team of product experts whose interactions would enhance the relationship with its customers and, therefore, its brand. Senior management, committed to obtaining "best-in-class" practices across the organization, was looking for:

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2. Documented success in providing consumers with contact experiences that exceed their expectations.

3. Specialized technology with future scope and bandwidth projections.

4. The ability to turn call data into strategic and actionable knowledge.

5. The skill to create a client-focused culture within a dedicated team.

6. A strong commitment to continuous improvement, enhanced service and cost efficiencies.

The result of the search was the creation of a partnership with Telerx.

Taking It To The Next Level — Driving Revenue

Like all marketers, the client company was under increasing pressure to grow revenue. The company looked for help with integrating strategic selling with customer service. Now, instead of just taking orders and making product suggestions, revenue generation is a formal part of the program.

The key to integrating a sales effort and capitalizing on revenue opportunities was maintaining — not compromising — the superior level of service the company's customers expect. To achieve that goal, Telerx and the client collaborated with a third-party marketing consultant to create a three-pronged approach to the sales effort integration:

1. A solution-selling training program was developed to equip the representatives with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and capitalize on revenue opportunities. The training also helped these representatives, who had been so focused on customer care, overcome their concerns about selling to customers. Since solution selling hinges on asking appropriate questions to better identify and offer products that meet customers' needs, representatives quickly felt comfortable with the process. They view it as a way to provide enhanced customer service — not just trying to sell.

2. A sales goal incentive was developed and implemented for the customer service representatives. Under the tiered incentive program, representatives can earn cash bonuses based on the number of machines and/or accessories sold monthly. Since the quality of each phone call is paramount, monthly quality monitoring results are also factored into the incentive payout.

3. The skill sets learned during the solution-selling training are reinforced through monthly quality monitoring and feedback sessions.

Results from the solution-selling initiative have exceeded the company's goals. During the first quarter of the program, the customer care team generated a revenue increase that exceeded the aggressive goal of 20 percent.

For more information about Telerx, please contact Ron Abel, Executive Vice President, at abel@telerx.com or 800-283-5379.

As always, I welcome your comments. Please e-mail them to me at ntehrani@tmcnet.com. **CIS**

Sincerely yours,
Nadji Tehrani
Executive Group Publisher, Editor-in-Chief

satisfaction, call quality, close rates and a multitude of other indicators. Many organizations spend countless hours having reports pulled and spreadsheets built and updated to attempt to build a cohesive picture of what's happening in the business. However, without an automated system to bring these data together, the time required can cause the information to be so out of date it loses much of its relevance. By implementing a system that consolidates information, and then applying goals throughout the customer care employee hierarchy, from the highest-level executive goals down to appropriately weighted individual agent activities, you will be able to guide your organization in achieving the correct balance of activities and priorities to move from cost-creating behaviors to profit-producing habits.

Improve The People And The Processes

So, if an organization can properly lay out goals, guidelines and incentives, and then monitor them to fine-tune what's happening, you can drive profitability, correct? Actually, it isn't quite that easy. If it were, then all that any organization would have to do is put together a great incentive plan after it figures out what goals and policies are best to achieve its target results. The variable is the performance of the people in the contact center and the processes that are in place to improve each individual's performance.

The maximum organizational performance comes from hiring the best-suited people and then providing them with the best training, coaching, mentoring, guidance and working environment. But often the goals of maximizing performance and achieving profits in the call center are not viewed as priorities for departments outside of the call center. For example, most training and human resource departments are not measured on how their activities affect the performance of the contact center. If the hiring process isn't bringing in new agents that get up-to-speed quickly and achieve results, shouldn't the HR manager be pushed to improve? Similarly, trainers should not be measured by how many people they train, but if their efforts improved the performance of their students and, subsequently, the bottom line. In this way, every department that can push the profit goals of customer care has "skin-in-the-game" to ensure that profit goals are met, and they are all held accountable. This type of total performance culture enables bringing ancillary processes, such as training, mentoring, hiring etc., into the mix to drive the successful implementation of changing from an activity-based cost center to a goal-oriented profit center.

For more information about Performix Technologies, visit http://www.performixtechnologies.com. **CIS**

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

June 2005

In This Issue

Going into summer, *Customer Interaction Solutions* brings you news of excellent CRM, "uncentered" call centers, e-learning and what a Raindance can bring you (besides rain).

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20 Tracey Schelmetic chats with Davacord CEO Jon McNaught about the company's new name and abiding principles.

78 Cisco reveals why call routing in TDM-based contact centers is inherently inefficient.

56 Simulation can be good (just not in cheese products). SIVOX examines why using smart simulations to train agents is so vital in the call center.

50 Finally, wait no longer to see true CRM Excellence. This month, the editors of Customer Interaction Solutions reveal a few of those who rule CRM.

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June 2005 Volume 23/ Number 12

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50 *CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions* Magazine's Sixth Annual CRM Excellence Awards, Part I

For the sixth consecutive year, the editors of Customer Interaction Solutions dared readers to prove that their companies have what it takes to win the coveted CRM Excellence Award. In this issue, we present Part One of the winners. (Part II will be presented in the July issue). The winners are companies that offer the best and the brightest customer relationship management products and services, all to the benefit of their clients. Winners were chosen on hard data…quantifiable results that convinced us, without a doubt, that their clients were infinitely better off with these companies' products and services than without.

OUTSOURCING TELESERVICES

56 Simulation Training: The Power Of Continuous Performance Optimization

By Wade Baker, Sivox Technology Inc.

There are more than 160,000 call centers in operation worldwide. These centers are facing increasing challenges, including globalization, the need for more knowledgeable call agents, pressure to reduce training costs and rapid acceleration in call volumes. Add to this the necessity to attract and retain highly skilled employees, and there is a critical need for more effective and efficient training of call center employees.

60 Fix It Now: Using On-Demand E-learning To Stop Bad Habits

By Henry Lach, Syntora

E-learning has gained momentum in call centers as a tool that is used in conjunction with classroom-based training to keep agents' skills at the level required to meet customer service goals. While most e-learning is delivered on a scheduled basis to train agents in generic topics ranging from new procedures to how to handle a disgruntled customer, a new and complementary model is emerging that can be used to correct the specific performance deficiencies of individual agents as soon as they are identified. This strategy is known as on-demand e-learning.

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By Steve McCoy, Director, Strategic Technology Planning

Find... Ctrl+F
Find Next F3

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64 This Is The Best Thing EVER! …Don't Tell Anyone.

By David R. Butcher, Assistant Editor, *Customer Interaction Solutions*

CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY

66 The Real Case For The Home-Based Agent Model

By Jim Ball, Alpine Access

Terms such as "home-shoring" are creeping into the call center vernacular, implying that companies should look at the use of home-based agents as a way of gaining the benefits of offshore centers (low per-unit cost) without having to deal with the operational and political concerns associated with sending calls out of the country. Not only is this inaccurate, it is also, in ways, a red herring. This article addresses the real value proposition offered by the use of home-based agents.

70 Virtualize Your Contact Center

By Hollie Moran, Aspect Communications Corp.

For organizations operating several contact centers, each site is frequently ill-designed to meet local or regional requirements, with best practices based on only a part of the bigger corporate picture. Agents in different locations are often trained differently, interpret corporate policies differently, and may even work using information culled from different databases. This lack of consistency can even extend to customer greetings and IVR prompts.

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By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, *Customer Interaction Solutions*

IP CONTACT CENTER

78 The Next Step In The Evolution Of Customer Care: The Customer Interaction Network

By Don Proctor, Cisco Systems

Clearly, businesses understand the importance of improving the contact center, and the technology to accomplish this is available. As companies embrace Internet Protocol (IP) as the foundation of their business networks, they've already laid the groundwork for supporting integrated communication channels and greater customer visibility. So what is behind the delay in implementing these improvements?

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A SPECIAL EDITORIAL SERIES SPONSORED BY INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE

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88 Design Issues In Multilingual Applications
By Tom Houwing and Paul Greiner, VUI Group, VoiceObjects
Anyone who calls into an IVR (interactive voice response) system and experiences the "hear and feel" of the interface will necessarily form a mental model of the interaction. Drawing on past experiences and cultural norms, the caller's expectations about how to interact with the system will be set.

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This month, TMC Labs looks at Raindance Meeting Edition, an innovative Web conference solution.

TMCNET.COM ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Voxify Improves Speech Agents

By David Sims, TMCnet CRM Alert Columnist
Alameda, California-based Voxify has pretty strong incentive to help their customers succeed using Voxify's speech agents – they get paid per every successfully-completed call, according to an interview with Voxify CEO Adeeb Shanaa.
To read the full article, visit http://www.tmcnet.com/124.1

Testing And Troubleshooting Complex New IP Services

By Jason Collins, Spirent Communications
There are many challenges involved in launching voice, data, and video services over IP networks. The high complexity of IP services makes it extremely difficult to locate and troubleshoot problems. Troubleshooting is further complicated when the strategy for operations is an afterthought in the rollout process for these services.
To read the full article, visit http://www.tmcnet.com/125.1

How To Wreck A Nice Beach

By Robert Liu, Executive Editor, TMCnet
For those who aren't familiar with the phrase, the title of this article is arguably the most well-known idiom used in the field of scientific speech research. That's because the phrase beautifully demonstrates the confusion that can wreak havoc on automated speech recognition (ASR) or text-to-speech (TTS) systems that misconstrue "How to Wreck a Nice Beach" with "How to Recognize Speech."
To read the full article, visit http://www.tmcnet.com/126.1

Internet Telephony's Rich Tehrani Comments On FCC Ruling; VoIP Industry Leader Offers Cautious Optimism

"While it is important to protect consumers, it is equally important to enable nascent technologies that can change the telecom landscape to evolve without undue burden. The benefits of consumer VoIP should not be underestimated, and hampering its growth is not good for the U.S. economy or the competitive telecom landscape."
To read the full article, visit http://www.tmcnet.com/127.1

CORRECTION:
In the May issue's advertising index, the URL of Apex America was incorrectly stated. The correct URL is http://www.apexamerica.com. *CIS editors regret the error.*

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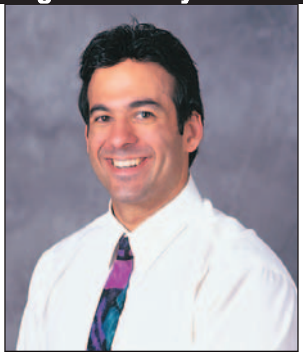

By: Rich Tehrani,
Group Editor-in-Chief,
Technology Marketing Corporation

Speech-World And The World Of Speech

What's happening in the world of speech? Lots. I recently attended TMC's Speech-World event in Dallas and learned a great deal about the future of speech technology. At some point over the horizon, I am convinced we will all have natural language-enabled assistants that will be able to both access vast amounts of information and answer questions about virtually any topic. As I mentioned at the show, the biggest threat to offshore outsourcing is speech. This won't happen this year, but at the end of 2006 we will start to see more mainstream acceptance of speech in businesses. 2007 and 2008 will likely be the years during which speech technologies will come into their own.

Customer Interaction Solutions' sister publication is *Internet Telephony* magazine. During the mid-1990s, I observed three growth cycles of VoIP. First, everyone had to have IP telephony. A year later, no one seemed to want it. I saw upturns followed by market drops in 1996-1997 as well as 1999-2003. Now, 2005 is the year of VoIP.

The point is, we should be used to technology slowly becoming ready for prime time and going through ups and downs until finally the arrival of an acceptance period followed by a budgeting period. My intuition tells me that 2007/8 will be the right time for this to really happen in large numbers in speech. Yes, there is market research out there that may be more optimistic than me, but I trust my intuition more than the research, as the fickle nature of purchasing decision makers is tough to take into account via typical research methodology.

So often, we think about IP contact centers merely saving money. In many cases, they can save and make you money simultaneously.

In the meantime, while we wait for everyone to have speech in their enterprise, I am seeing applications that handle the low-hanging fruit. For example, Cisco (quote - news - alert) announced at the show that it will have a speech recognition product named Galileo available soon. Cisco's Vickie McGovern gave an incredible presentation on her vision for speech and how speech will redefine communications.

The core message of the keynote was that speech can reduce the complexity associated with business communications. She touched on a variety of key elements including virtualization; Rich Media (focusing on personalization preferences); natural language processing (for such applications as directory services, e-mail and voice mail access, password services, communications management, and calendar management); and modality, presence and context (a good example: someone calls me while I'm on another call, I respond via IM, and the response is read back to the caller utilizing speech technology).

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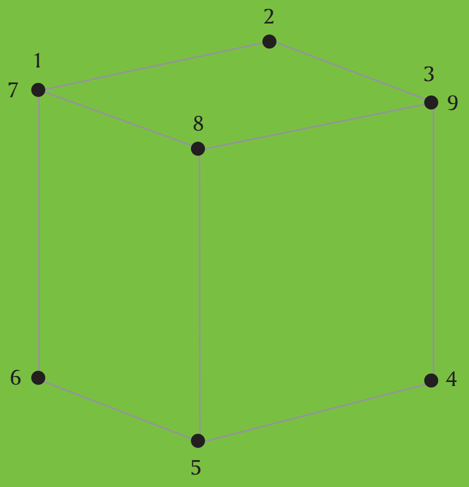

their idea

[We didn’t come up with the same conclusions.]

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Not to diminish any element of Ms. McGovern's presentation — the whole keynote was compelling, and she had my attention throughout — but perhaps the highlight was the demonstration of Cisco's upcoming Galileo product. This was the first such public demo of Galileo, components of which will begin shipping this fall. On the surface, the application reminded me of an application called Wildfire.

McGovern used a standard desktop phone to call into the system, and using voice commands, she navigated through her e-mail inbox, listening to messages from, among others, Cisco President and CEO John Chambers. The demo also showcased Ms. McGovern accessing her appointments from her Outlook Calendar.

I'm definitely looking forward to seeing more of this application in the near future.

McGovern closed by declaring a new world of communications as we enter a phase she called "communications experience convergence," during which we will see an increase in business process efficiencies. "Speech is redefining communications," she said, "affording anywhere anytime access, and streamlining communications. Those are the key elements that speech brings to the table."

Aculab's Take On Speech

Aculab's (news - alert) Mike Matthews, head of product marketing, followed McGovern to the stage. Matthews played up to his company's position as a provider of DSP resource boards and other tools for the development community. "We don't do solutions," he said, "but rather, facilitate them."

Matthews started off with a thought-provoking assertion: "Speech will become redundant," he declared.

His talk ranged across a wide variety of interesting topics, including the fact that often in technology, the most interesting and lasting technical developments are frequently unanticipated byproducts. He gave a good example of how Teflon was developed as a heat-resistant element for NASA's space shuttle program, but the chemical coating has become best-known for its non-stick use on kitchen pans and utensils.

How many commissioned technologies actually become successful, and how many were unanticipated successes? Matthews prodded the audience, "What about speech?"

He gave a wonderful example of how technology that was used in a prison to enable inmates to have greater access to making calls to the outside world (based on a series of privileges, earned credits and good behavior, etc.). Some of the technologies needed to enable secure prison telecommunications, such as speaker verification (for authentication) and word spotting (for monitoring the content of the calls), have found their way into mainstream speech applications, proving Matthews' assertion that "Specialist partners working together with speech technology elements can result in innovative business solutions."

The presentation closed with his discussion of addressing the reality that experience drives different approaches to old problems. For example, first-generation products are tougher to develop than subsequent revisions. Second-generation development builds on past experience, leading to more successful deployment of products.

"We need to keep working to improve the perception of speech-enabled solutions," said Matthews.

The Innovators At Spanlink

I had a chance to meet with Spanlink (news - alert) at the show. They are doing some amazing things with IP contact center technologies. I wrote about the company over a year ago and continue to be impressed with how they have adapted to the changing world of IP contact centers. Ten years ago, we wrote about Spanlink in this magazine, as it was one of the first companies to enable "call me" buttons on Web sites. At the time, this was novel and the company was way ahead of the industry.

Spanlink employees briefed me on the growth the company is experiencing, and we then came to discuss its biggest customer, a company called Grainger (http://www.grainger.com), which I can best describe as a Home Depot-style hardware store with a focus on industrial specialty items. The company has 450 branches, and when customers call, they like the ability to speak with someone with a similar accent who is from their local region. People call the store because they have questions about products and whether those products are in stock. The company sends out voluminous catalogs — the online catalog is more than 3,000 pages. I am sure there are many questions that potential customers have about the catalog, as the items are fairly technical. For example, a random look at page 3,481 of the online version shows a pneumatic receiver controller, whatever that is (please, no letters; I am sure I will never need to know what it is).

The company tried to consolidate and, at one point, a centralized call center was implemented to answer customer questions. Guess what? Customers didn't like it…they felt they had lost the personal touch of a local store.

The company turned to Spanlink, which built two distributed contact centers and a system to transfer calls to the branch closest to the caller. The solution was set up so that if no one was available to answer a call, it was sent to the next closest store after 20 seconds. From customers' standpoints, it was everything they wanted — someone from a similar area to speak with about their questions. By centralizing databases, anyone at a Grainger branch can tell which store has what inventory. This is a perfect win/win scenario.

One of the reasons I chose to write about Spanlink is that the Chairman and CEO of Grainger mentioned in a statement to financial analysts that due to the new Spanlink system, the number of calls answered within three rings went from 92 percent to 98 percent! The CEO went on to say the company expects incremental sales of one to two million dollars in the first year after the new system's installation.

So often, we think about IP contact centers merely saving money. In many cases, they can save and make you money simultaneously.

From a business standpoint, Spanlink has made a brilliant move by basing its product on Cisco VoIP technology. Spanlink enhances Cisco's product and makes it better. Cisco, in turn, has a vested interest in seeing Spanlink do well.

Back To Speech

Other big news at the show came in the form of Premiere Global Services (news - alert), which announced two new speech-enabled services to its portfolio. I spoke with Betsy Rahm, director of marketing communications, and Dewey Anderson, product management director. These two people were the perfect sources of information, as I learned about the current and future shape of Premiere's services.

If you haven't watched closely, you may have missed the fact that this company was formerly Xpedite, a leader in the fax solutions market. Premiere is now a global powerhouse in communications, providing messaging in every format from voice to e-mail to fax to SMS. The company has 46,000 worldwide customers and has broadcasted 14 million messages in a single day. I am told it benefited greatly from the political campaign season last November.

The company has also specialized in niches in the market, such as dispatching, where it has a solution called DispatchManager that automates and increases the efficiency of truck roll-outs to customers. The company also has a product in the mortgage space named, logically enough, MortgageManager. A more generic service is Collections-Accelerator. Who couldn't use a turbo-charging solution in accounts receivable?

One of the areas Premiere Global Services sees as important to its growth is voice, where the company is honing the power of speech to increase its value to customers. A new application announced at the show uses the power of speech to survey. As part of an outbound campaign, an individual can be called and asked if he or she wants to be part of a survey. If the person responds in the affirmative, he or she is launched into an application that conducts a survey, requesting answers of "yes," "no" or multiple choice answers to a series of questions.

There is also a new collections application that allows companies to both ask for balances due and collect the money on the spot via credit card. This is a very powerful product as, in my experience, people who owe money are generally embarrassed to speak with a live agent. Having an automated call followed by automated collection is the best way to increase payments. The next step for this application is to take checks by phone — something I am told is in the works.

Anderson and I also talked about the future of such services, and we discussed that the most immediate product we may see is a shopping cart application that allows a customer to receive a reminder call about a potential purchase; for example, contact lenses that need ordering, or printer ink. A customer answers the phone, and if he or she decides the product is desired, the customer responds regarding the item and quantities. There is certainly a convenience factor here that is a win/win for consumers and for companies using these services.

Another future service we will see, perhaps as soon as August of this year, is authentication applications that allow the home of a student who fails to show up at school to receive a call about the absence. Authentication ensures that a parent, not the student, gets the message.

I asked for examples of more future applications as I was partly intrigued by the possibilities of these services and partly ecstatic that these applications didn't exist when I was in high school. A query about what could be next led to a wonderful discussion about a new concept for such services. Imagine finding a product you like — perhaps at a friend's house. Let's say it's a pair of shoes that retails for $200. You don't want to pay more than $150. You enter — probably via a Web site — the product info and the maximum amount you will pay. You then set a reminder to follow you as you travel. When you are within X miles of a location that sells the product you want for the price you want, you will get a call to let you know the price and location.

One would imagine eBay would be a natural company to take advantage of such a service, or perhaps Google's Froogle service. Of course, many things need to happen before such a service could work. Infrastructure would need to be in place, etc. I did think of another application in which this technology could work today. Assume Apple comes out with a new iPod, or there is any hot consumer electronics device on the market that is in short supply. Using the Apple example, I could go to the company's Web site and sign up to receive a call when the item I want is within five miles of me. Theoretically, Apple knows which stores have the iPods. Perhaps over time, consumers would get used to using such services, which could then grow in functionality. Remember that GPS is built into many phones, so this application could be built now.

Some of the most interesting services, according to the company, are those that combine broadcast functionality with backend transactions. I really think the shopping cart idea has legs, and spam has drastically reduced the effectiveness of e-mail. The phone, coupled with a speech recognition/transaction processing backend, is an inexpensive and effective way to communicate with customers.

Speech is far from the mainstream, and one of the hurdles mentioned at the show is the fact that speech solutions are still expensive to deploy and maintain. Accuracy is there, but it costs money. As prices drop, we can expect to see more widespread adoption of the technology. Perhaps hosting is the most cost-effective way to deploy these technologies today. The combination of IP contact center and speech technologies together needs to be explored, as every contact center can save money and increase sales when these technologies are implemented correctly. When they are used synergistically, look out!

Thanks go to Greg Galitzine and his blog on TMCnet for assisting me with portions of this column. To read Greg's blog, which is updated daily and generally covers every important development in VoIP, please visit: http://voip-blog.tmcnet.com/blog/greg-galitzine/. **CIS**

Sincerely yours, Rich Tehrani
rtehrani@tmcnet.com

CEO Spotlight

Jon McNaught,
CEO
Davacord

This month, *Customer Interaction Solutions*® speaks with Jon McNaught, CEO of Davacord.

CIS: First of all, you recently incurred a name change from VoiceLogger to Davacord. Can you speak briefly to what prompted the change?

JM: Our product has evolved way beyond merely logging phone calls. We felt the name VoiceLogger, while descriptive of one of the main functions of our product, was actually quite restrictive in its description of what our complete solution offers customers. DigiVoiceXE is an advanced, feature-rich technology tool that enables people and businesses to capture relevant and extremely important data, and then easily access and use those data to help them with their business. Updating the name VoiceLogger to Davacord (news - alert) was an important step in allowing our company name to be more representative of our solutions' capabilities.

CIS: How has the quality monitoring process changed in the past few years? How has Davacord, as a company, had to alter its offerings to accommodate legislation, restrictions, the legal environment, and the centralization of all forms of customer contact media (a particularly tricky prospect, I'm sure)?

JM: The key changes in the quality monitoring process have been driven by changes in technology and associated costs. In the 1990s and the early part of this decade, companies had to make a decision — quality monitoring for only a selection of their staff, or recording everyone and everything. It was an either/or decision based on completely different hardware and software architectures and the need for expensive investments in storage, interface technology, integration with complementary products and so forth.

Today, especially in the case of DigiVoiceXE, advances in hardware and software, along with significant cost reductions in many hardware components of recording solutions, have allowed the creation of solutions that can perform many different and varying functions within an organization. Our offering, with its design as a converged recording solution for both quality assurance and full-time recording needs, inherently accommodates the wide variety of state and federal recording requirements, at the same time maintaining the flexibility customers need to run their business.

CIS: We all know that call recording systems are only as good as the technologies that allow users to search, track and issue reports from the data (a pile of data is just a pile of data, until you do something with it, after all). What steps has Davacord taken with its tracking and reporting capabilities to make users' lives easier?

JM: This question goes to the heart of what our solution is all about — providing to the masses a powerful, robust technology tool that is easy to implement, affordable and simple to operate. Not only is a pile of data of little value if it isn't easily accessible and decipherable; but a recording customer has to be able to provide that tool to its employees, and the employees have to embrace and use that tool to make their jobs easier. One of the advantages of DigiVoiceXE which differentiates us from other providers of similar technology tools is that our solution is so easy to use and understand. It is intuitive, and any employee who uses a computer can be utilizing the most challenging aspects of DigiVoiceXE's capabilities within a few minutes, with very little training. In order to be successful in today's challenging recording environment, the technology MUST be powerful, affordable AND simple to operate. That third differentiator is probably what separates our product from those of many of our competitors. It is unusual in this environment to find a powerful, affordable technology tool that is simple to operate. We believe that we have engineered such a product.

Specific to tracking and reporting, DigiVoiceXE takes into account two important principles — capture relevant data, and make those data available in various ways for review and analysis. Davacord designed the DigiVoiceXE platform to not only record, but capture important call information that can be attributed to the call, ranging from simple caller I.D. information and DNIS all the way to unique data from a customer's CRM application via our API. Beyond that, our integrated reporting package allows a myriad of information-rich reports to be run at the click of a few buttons, providing those valuable data back in an easy-to-understand format. We've listened to our customers when designing our reports for their use, as well as made the ability to export our report data or integrate the data with other reporting packages easier than ever.

CIS: How, specifically, does ROI result from implementing up-to-date recording and monitoring applications?

JM: ROI flows from efficiency. The more efficiently a company can operate, the better the return on [its] investment of people and resources. This includes the removal of manual processes, automation of performance evaluations, simplified reporting and so forth. The most important set of data to any company is the communications between its employees and their customers. The ability to capture and analyze all of those data is the key to identifying and creating efficiencies, and then better managing those processes to make [its] business more efficient.

CIS: Please explain how products such as DigiVoiceXE can be customized to meet what I assume must be the wildly varying needs in recording and monitoring from industry to industry. Can you talk about how some of your customers are using DigiVoiceXE?

JM: DigiVoiceXE is extremely flexible. It was engineered that way to allow both us and our customers to perform many different and varying functions. The open architecture and flexible and programmable search and playback capabilities allow our solution to change with the environment according to the specific needs of the customer. Because of the inherent flexibilities within DigiVoiceXE, it can be applied to most any vertical market or application that a customer demands, regardless of industry. Our solution is currently being utilized in every “traditional” recording market application, including Public Safety (Police, Fire, Emergency 911); many different applications within the financial markets (banking, brokers/trading, financing); the traditional contact centers; and many general business applications. It is this last category that I believe holds proof of our product’s capabilities. Many “non-traditional” recording markets in the general business sector are realizing what a powerful, affordable and easy-to-use data-capture tool can do to dramatically improve their businesses and their bottom lines.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our product and its application within a very demanding and exciting technology market.

CIS: Thank you for speaking with us.

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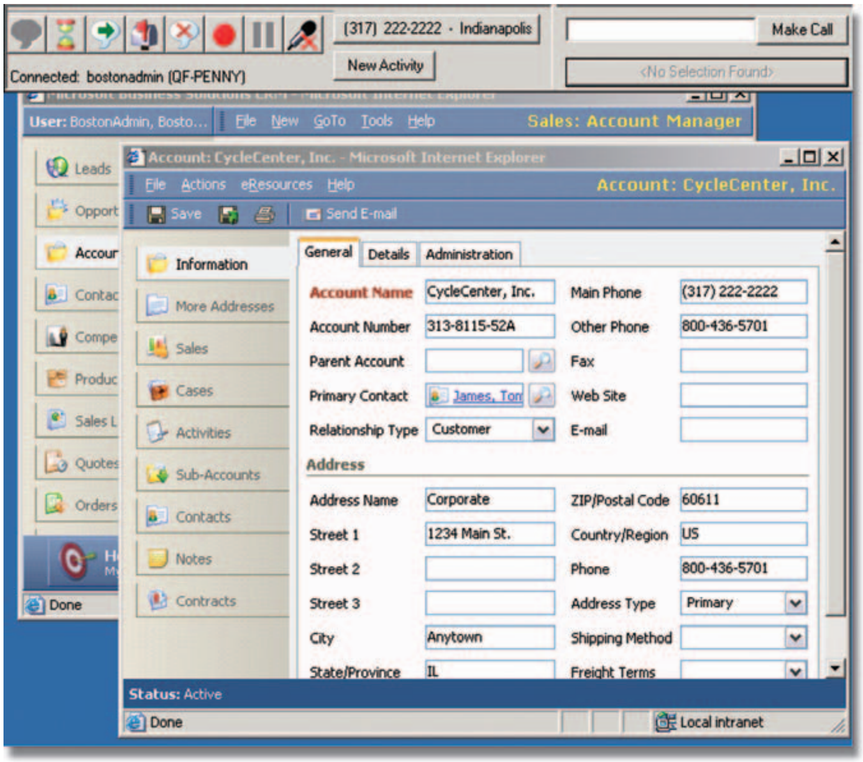
Interactive Intelligence's Updated CIC Integrates And Diets

By David R. Butcher,
Assistant Editor,
Customer Inter@ction Solutions



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Interactive Intelligence (news - alert) recently enhanced its Customer Interaction Center (CIC) software suite, already with meritorious built-in components and pre-integrated add-on applications, to offer significant integration and .NET thin client inclusion, as if the bundled communications application software suite wasn't already efficient and easy enough.

The CIC product is proffered with resolve to be, according to the creator company, particularly advantageous for contact centers that hold 25 to 400 agents, as well as for multisite contact centers with thousands of agents (and VoIP initiatives). Also, customer-driven enterprises and teleservices outsourcers, with rapidly changing service requirements, were taken into account so that confusion, inaccuracies or senescence don't stir ineffectuality. The suite was specifically designed to meet the performance requirements of which each aforementioned target strategically demands.

A Bit More

More than a product simply for routing calls and reporting agent productivity, contact centers are provided with a pre-integrated application suite in Customer Interaction Center. As well, a flexible automatic call distribution (ACD) capability is provided, with skills-based routing and multimedia queuing and routing, to manage multiple media of business communications — phone calls, e-mail and Web interactions — from one platform. Also to consider, though: the inherent PBX/IP-PBX (define - news - alert) call processing, voice mail, fax server and unified messaging of CIC allow these communications to reach throughout the enterprise; this is an allowance that empowers the enterprise's agents, supervisors and business users to be more fructuous in performance, not to mention to elevate the quality of customer service. This conflation to an all-in-one multimedia contact center platform, essentially, can reduce the number of required systems — leverage for complexity-reducing targets.

Microsoft Integrations

Interactive Intelligence's latest version of CIC (shipping mid-May, as of this writ) offers some significant integration enhancements, including new client integrations for various Microsoft applications (Outlook; CRM; Great Plains); out-of-the-box screen-pops and IVR integration for MS Great Plains and MS CRM; and MS Live Communications Server integration. Essentially, these new client integrations enable users to perform most standard call-handling functions directly from whichever Microsoft application of the users' choosing — eliminating the need to switch between applications — along with the ability to receive screen-pops that contain caller data critical to, and simultaneous with, each call.

Weight Loss

Further, a telling feature enhancement is the addition of a new .NET thin client. Like TRIMSPA, CIC's new .NET thin client curtails the excess heaviness

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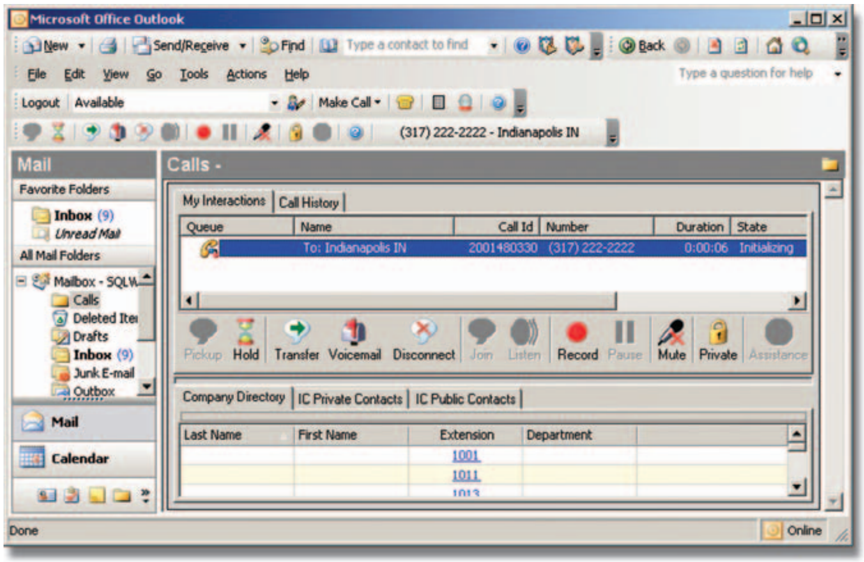
(TRIMSPA offers products to make thin its clients; CIC offers products that *are* thin clients); it reduces bandwidth requirements and eliminates the need to install software at each desktop, ushering in minimal-effort deployment. This thin client enables customers to more quickly and easily deploy the software, especially for large numbers of distributed users. The thin client includes "rich but lightweight" client functionality designed for more flexible and efficient communications, including the following:

- The ability to configure information views for quicker look-ups;
- Enhanced alerts for easier identification of incoming calls;
- The ability to configure personal rules for customized call handling; and
- A personal rules wizard for easier customization (e.g., building rules for handling interactions and alerts).

e-FAQ Effect

Also, with its latest addendums, Interactive Intelligence's Web self-service and e-mail response management system, e-FAQ, is a considerable fit when pre-integrated with CIC. The Web-based authoring interface and linguistic analysis and artificial intelligence techniques of e-FAQ were designed to abbreviate e-mail and Web-based response time; to nurture response accuracy; to enhance operational efficiencies; to polish customer service; and, finally, to reduce costs associated with multiple-channel interactions. Offering automated responses to e-mail and Web inquiries, the functionality consequently enables customers to convalesce costs by speeding self-service resolution in response to contact center inquiries.

The latest betterments to e-FAQ include the following: an auto-detect search option, for increasing response accuracy rates; enhancements to Boolean searches, for making search options more flexible; a Rich Text Editor, for simplified knowledge base content authoring; and extended multilingual capabilities, most ideal for multinational companies, according to the company.


Microsoft Office Outlook
New
Send/Receive
Find
Type a contact to find
Back
File
Edit
View
Go
Tools
Actions
Help
Type a question for help
Logout
Available
Make Call
(317) 222-2222 - Indianapolis IN
Mail
Favorite Folders
Inbox (9)
Unread Mail
All Mail Folders
Mailbox - SQLW
Calls
Deleted Ite
Drafts
Inbox (9)
Junk E-mail
Outbox
Mail
Calendar
Calls -
My Interactions
Call History
Pickup
Hold
Transfer
Voicemail
Disconnect
Join
Listen
Record
Pause
Mute
Private
Assistance
Company Directory
IC Private Contacts
IC Public Contacts
Done
Online

Queue	Name	Call Id	Number	Duration	State
	To: Indianapolis IN	2001480330	(317) 222-2222	0:00:06	Initializing

Last Name	First Name	Extension	Department
		1001	
		1011	
		1013	

IT Staff Thanks You

Even more, because it is a standards-based solution (including SIP with architecture), the CIC software requires no multiple-box hardware or customization, easing implementation and maintenance by the IT staff. Administration is centralized in a single interface, and the software attempts to countervail the complexity often associated with CTI. Dissimilar to hardware-centric proprietary solutions, the IP-ready CIC architecture allows organizations a clear and direct path for adopting VoIP at any time, which makes it so no "bolt-on" VoIP products are required, according to a company representative.

And Then…

Finally, CIC includes the following highlighted features: traditional TDM and IP-based switching with SIP support; interactive voice response (IVR) with optional speech recognition; an all-software IP-based version using Intel's HMP software; a desktop soft phone with full call control and presence management; call monitoring and recording; unified messaging; Web chat and callback; screen-pop; fax services; and more.

Interactive Intelligence proposes a single, pre-integrated user interface, a thin-client strategy and a tool for knowledge management simplification in its Customer Interaction Center suite; these in order to increase satisfaction, speed and efficiency of both the client and the customer.

For information and subscriptions,
visit http://www.TMCnet.com or call 203-852-6800.

CIS

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StarTek Names New President, CEO
vCustomer Names New President, COO
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Things to do today:
Optimize agent performance
Pinpoint areas of improvement
Enhance customer experience
~~Obliterate competition~~

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Best Software Introduces New CRM Suite, New Company Name

Sage Software (formerly **Best Software**), (news - alert) a provider of business management products and services, has introduced Sage CRM, a full suite of configurable customer relationship management (CRM) software that is fully Web-based. Available both as a hosted service (at SageCRM.com) and for on-premises deployment, it includes the ability to move between either as their business needs dictate. Aimed at small and midsized businesses (SMBs), Sage CRM also provides its clients with more supporting technology options, including Outlook and Lotus Notes integration, plus IBM DB2, MS SQL, Oracle and Sybase database options. In addition, an ACCPAC edition provides bi-directional integration (both front office/back office) with the ACCPAC Advantage Series accounting and operations management software. The new product offering comes with a rent-to-own investment protection guarantee that provides businesses with a safety net for their hosted CRM investment.

Sage Software is formerly Best Software, adopting the new name for consistency with its parent firm, the **Sage Group plc**. As part of the branding transition, the company will also add the Sage name to its products' naming structure as new releases occur. The transition began in May, and the full transition is targeted to be complete by March 1, 2006.

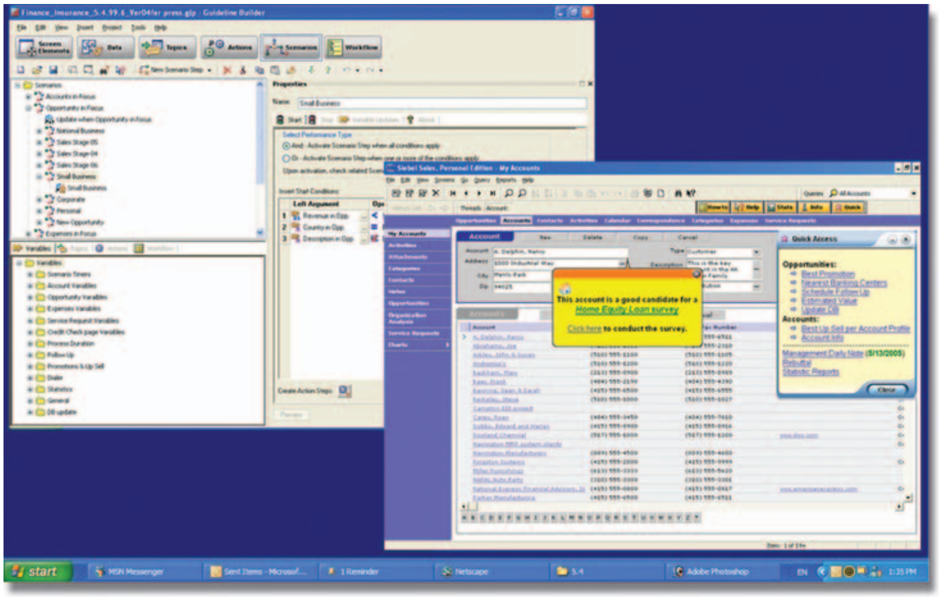
http://www.bestsoftware.com
http://www.sage.com

e-Glue Launches Guideline 5.4, Real-Time CIO Suite

e-Glue Software Technologies (news - alert) has launched Guideline 5.4, a new version of the company's real-time customer interaction optimization software suite for contact centers. Guideline 5.4 is aimed at enabling companies to realize significant and sustainable performance improvements at their contact centers through personalized customer service, knowledge delivery and increased customer feedback through real-time surveys. Featuring an improved graphical user interface, Guideline 5.4 introduces new capabilities to the Builder, the suite's authoring tool. The Builder enables non-technical business users to define the business processes and workflows that will impact the performance of their contact centers. Guideline 5.4 also adds one-to-one customer management capabilities to the Builder, enabling enterprises to define a set of treatments for customer groups or a unique set of rules for each customer. Business-to-business companies will be able to rapidly implement customer rules supporting complicated processes and business arrangements at their centers. In this new version, companies can create HTML balloons that interact in real time with knowledge management systems, ensuring agents are presented with relevant and up-to-date information.

Guideline 5.4 facilitates tailored customer interaction experiences by enabling business processes to follow decision-tree logic, and its real-time collection of customer data adds to the business intelligence of companies. In Guideline 5.4, enterprises can create real-time surveys that increase customer feedback and participation. Further, version 5.4 features a new content management system, enabling companies to define different levels of agent support based on experience levels.

http://www.e-glue.com


This account is a good candidate for a Home Equity Loan survey

Click here to conduct the survey.

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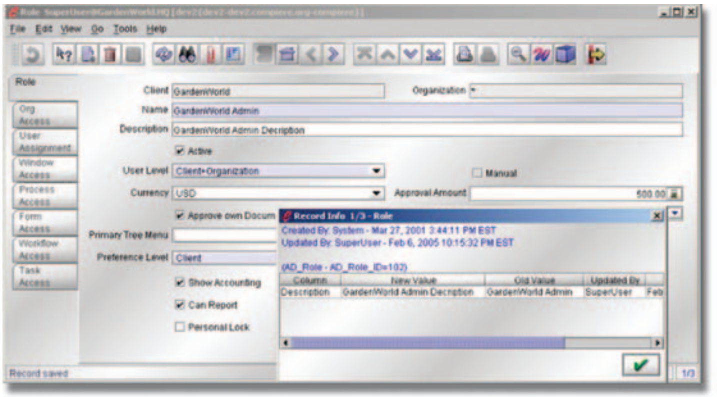
Compiere Releases Upgraded ERP, CRM Systems

Compiere, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of open-source business software applications, announced the release of Compiere ERP & CRM system, version 2.5.2c, with enhanced functionality and stability. The new version of the software features improved request functionality (issue tracking), batch (expense) invoice entry, and improved security management. This is in addition to the new costing infrastructure for the support of LiFo, FiFo and average costing. The upgrade was tested through a training process that involved the cooperation of more than 10 of Compiere's 50+ worldwide partners, completing quality assurance evaluations and other testing for effectiveness and functionality. Compiere's ERP and CRM systems have been downloaded more than 800,000 times throughout the world. The company provides an integrated, adaptable ERP and CRM application for small to medium-sized enterprises. The Compiere software application is primarily used in wholesale, distribution, retail and service environments, but it is also, according to a company statement, quickly building a strong user base in other industries. **http://www.compiere.org**


Client: GardenWorld
Organization: *
Name: GardenWorld Admin
Description: GardenWorld Admin Decription
☑ Active
User Level: Client+Organization
☐ Manual
Currency: USD
Approval Amount: 500.00
☑ Approve own Docum
Primary Tree Menu:
Preference Level: Client
☑ Show Accounting
☑ Can Report
☐ Personal Lock

Record Info 1/3 - Role
Created By: System - Mar 27, 2001 3:44:11 PM EST
Updated By: SuperUser - Feb 6, 2005 10:15:32 PM EST
(AD_Role - AD_Role_ID=102)

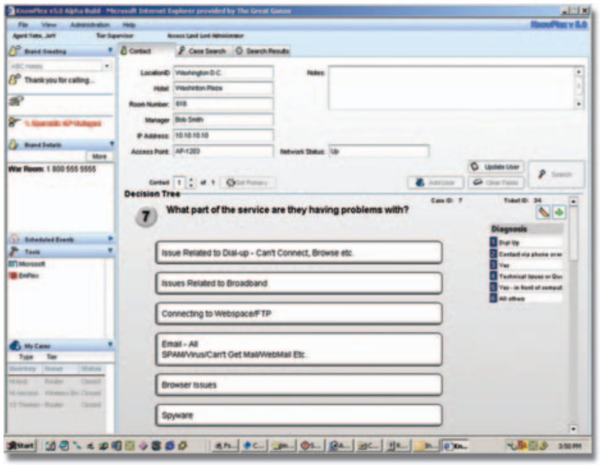
Column	New Value	Old Value	Updated By	
Description	GardenWorld Admin Decription	GardenWorld Admin	SuperUser	Feb

Record saved

Fused KnowPlex v5.0 Generally Available, CRM/Knowledge Base Management

Fused Solutions, (news - alert) a provider of help desk technology and contact center services, has announced the general availability of KnowPlex 5.0, its Web-native CRM and knowledge base management solution. Available either as an on-premise or on-demand solution, KnowPlex is designed to be suitable for both inbound and outbound customer care. It incorporates a script-based approach to knowledge base management. New or enhanced features incorporated into the 5.0 version include outbound campaign management, asset tracking, platform independence and enhanced business rules management. Also, API integration has been enhanced, and the application is both more scalable and more customizable than prior versions.

When combined with FS-Virtual Agent, the self-service application that shares the KnowPlex knowledge base engine, the solution offers end users a more seamless path for transitioning from self-service to agent-assisted support. Further, the addition of EmPlex — the company's workforce scheduling and HR communications solution — and any world-class ACD/IVR platform enables contact centers and enterprise help desks to provision an effective and comprehensive "call center-in-a-box" platform. **http://www.fusedsolutions.com**


LocationID: Washington D.C.
Hotel: Washington Plaza
Room Number: 618
Manager: Bob Smith
IP Address: 10.10.10.10
Access Point: AP-1203
Network Status: Up
War Room: 1 800 555 5555

Decision Tree
7 What part of the service are they having problems with?
Issue Related to Dial-up - Can't Connect, Browse etc.
Issues Related to Broadband
Connecting to Webspace/FTP
Email - All SPAM/Virus/Can't Get Mail/WebMail Etc.
Browser Issues
Spyware

Improve first call resolution.

Improve workforce planning.

Improve agent effectiveness.

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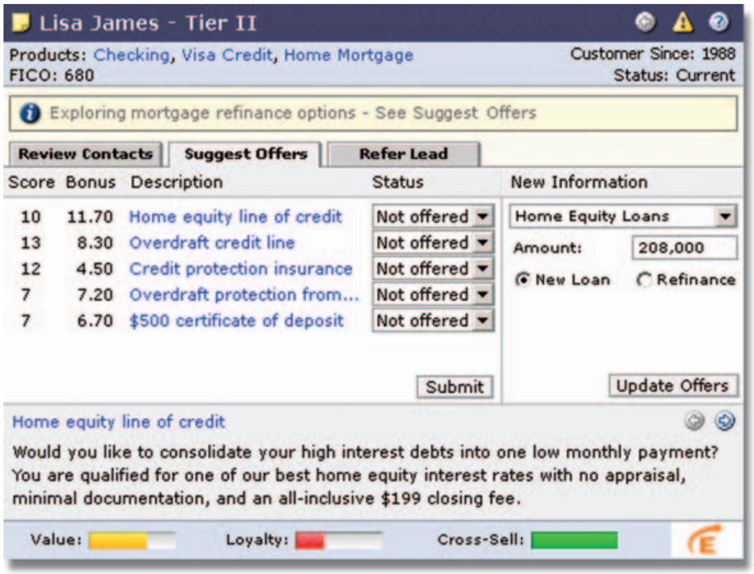
Epiphany Makes Available Latest Version Of CRM Software Suite

Epiphany, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of CRM solutions, has announced the immediate availability of the latest version of the Epiphany 6.5 CRM software suite. The Epiphany 6.5 software suite is a family of modular CRM applications designed to assist the largest consumer-oriented companies (e.g., in telecommunications, retail financial services and insurance industries) increase profitability by making every interaction intelligent. For large enterprises faced with complex integration and deployment challenges, Epiphany solutions are aimed at providing an easier way to augment existing systems to generate rapid ROI. The Epiphany 6.5 software suite can drive measurable business value by enhancing existing systems and allowing new functionality to be incrementally deployed over time. By leveraging a J2EE-based, service-oriented architecture, Epiphany solutions are designed to co-exist with current IT infrastructures and plug-in to existing customer data and service systems. This means companies are enabled to unify previously incompatible systems and to add real-time intelligence without the need for systems replacement.

The Epiphany 6.5 software suite blends three product lines, Epiphany Marketing, Epiphany Advisor, and Epiphany Sales and Service, each of which is powered by real-time intelligence and best-in-class analytics. New features, functionality and enhancements in the updated version include the following: an updated Interaction Advisor Agent client; streamlined Campaign Management processes with new security improvements and integration with third-party MRM solutions; new Epiphany Service capabilities for e-mail response management; new advanced portal support for Epiphany Advisor, Sales and Service; continued improvements in performance, scalability and developer tools for Epiphany Sales and Service; streamlined integration to existing customer systems; and extended platform support.

http://www.epiphany.com



Products: Checking, Visa Credit, Home Mortgage
FICO: 680
Customer Since: 1988
Status: Current

Exploring mortgage refinance options - See Suggest Offers

Score	Bonus	Description	Status
10	11.70	Home equity line of credit	Not offered
13	8.30	Overdraft credit line	Not offered
12	4.50	Credit protection insurance	Not offered
7	7.20	Overdraft protection from...	Not offered
7	6.70	$500 certificate of deposit	Not offered

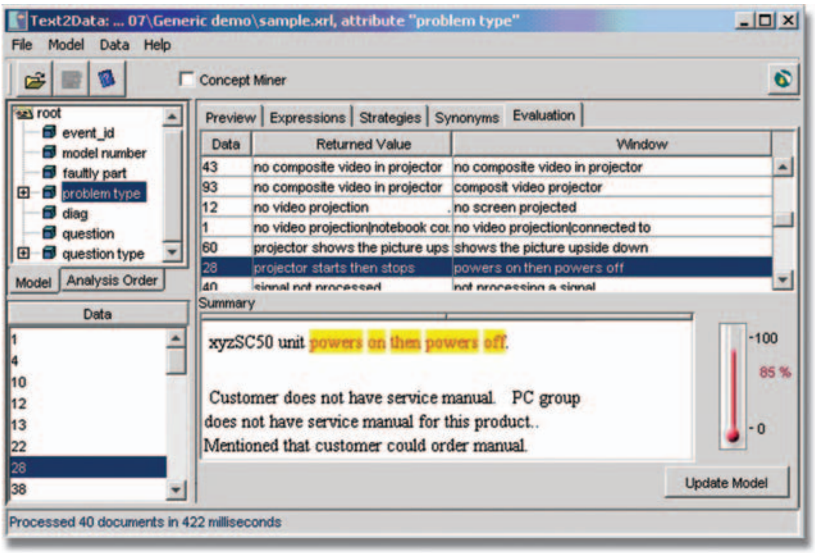
New Information
Home Equity Loans
Amount: 208,000
● New Loan ○ Refinance

Home equity line of credit

Would you like to consolidate your high interest debts into one low monthly payment? You are qualified for one of our best home equity interest rates with no appraisal, minimal documentation, and an all-inclusive $199 closing fee.

Kaidara Announces Enhanced Tool, Accelerates Knowledge Base Creation

Kaidara Software, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of software for building, managing and maintaining knowledge bases with problem-solving data, has announced the release of its Text2Data v3. The enhancements to the Text2Data tool, which is used in conjunction with Kaidara Advisor, assist customers in transforming unstructured (or semi-structured) data sources for inclusion in a knowledge base. The enhanced features in Text2Data provide advanced text mining and data modeling capabilities for accurate retrieval and rapid re-use of unstructured information in order to expand knowledge bases used to diagnose and solve complex customer support problems.



Data	Returned Value	Window
43	no composite video in projector	no composite video in projector
93	no composite video in projector	composit video projector
12	no video projection	no screen projected
1	no video projection|notebook cor	no video projection|connected to
60	projector shows the picture ups	shows the picture upside down
28	projector starts then stops	powers on then powers off
40	signal not processed	not processing a signal

Data
1
4
10
12
13
22
28
38

xyzSC50 unit powers on then powers off.

Customer does not have service manual. PC group does not have service manual for this product.. Mentioned that customer could order manual.

Processed 40 documents in 422 milliseconds

Text2Data is designed to add structure and meaning to textual information by extracting values and indexing the text with well-defined domain concepts. Text2Data mines text directly to find concepts and to help uncover syntactic variations and synonyms that can be included in a data model. This produces information that can be exploited to find similarities between situations, issues and questions for accurate capturing of knowledge and quick retrieval of answers from a repository of possible solutions. Text2Data can also be used to enrich textual material so it can be analyzed with standard reporting tools and statistical techniques for decision support. Using reporting tools and analytic methods, customers can identify common patterns (such as the frequency of a problem or the most effective path to a problem's resolution). Further, the data can also be used to uncover problems caused by product design issues; and it can identify forthcoming customer requirements.

http://www.kaidara.com

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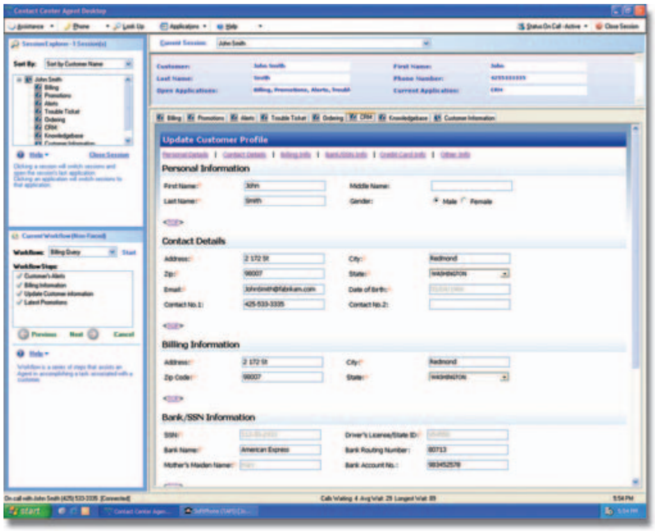
Microsoft Announces Contact Center Solution



Microsoft Corp. (quote - news - alert)has announced the general availability of Microsoft Customer Care Framework, an integrated software solution that streamlines call center operations for service providers. Microsoft Customer Care Framework is designed to assist call center operators in helping to improve customer service and reduce costs by decreasing average call times, eliminating redundant data requests and delivering better information faster to call center agents.

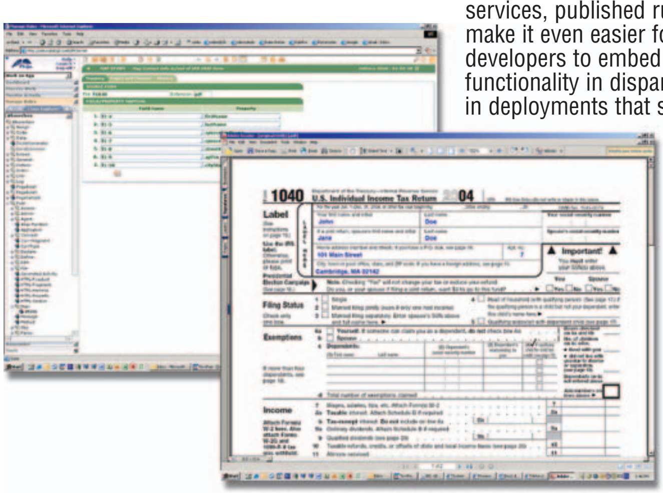
Microsoft Customer Care Framework integrates with service providers' existing CRM systems, operations support systems (OSS) and business support systems (BSS), providing a unified platform that consolidates disparate applications and automates contact center workflow. Initially targeted at service providers, the solution is also applicable to any business wherein call center operations represent a significant part of its operations. Based on Microsoft .NET technology and Web services architecture, Microsoft Customer Care Framework is easy to implement, integrate and deploy. It works in conjunction with a suite of products, including Microsoft BizTalk Server, Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft Windows Server and Microsoft Visual Studio .NET. In addition, Web services enable multiple data sources and applications to be accessed simultaneously, increasing overall call center productivity and improving the quality of customer service.

http://www.microsoft.com

Pegasystems Announces SmartBuild For Software Design, Built-In Design Methodology

Pegasystems Inc., (news - alert)a provider of smart business process management (BPM) software, has announced the availability of its latest SmartBPM Suite release, featuring built-in design and implementation support. Pegasystems' SmartBuild BPM release provides real-time feedback for software designers including, for example, an analysis of best-practice class structures and flexible property controls, providing built-in methodology diagnostics and intelligence. The release also includes ongoing enhancements for J2EE architects, including a new EJB (Enterprise Java Bean) interface to the business rules services, published rule services APIs to make it even easier for Java application developers to embed Pegasystems rules functionality in disparate applications typical in deployments that start with business rules, improved J2EE specific fail-over and reliability support for massively scaled solutions across a cluster of J2EE application servers.

http://www.pega.com



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Talisma Releases KnowledgeBase.net 5.0

Talisma, (news - alert) a provider of multichannel CRM solutions, has announced the immediate availability of Talisma KnowledgeBase.net 5.0, the company's Web self-service and customer support software. In addition to improving contact center efficiency, Talisma KnowledgeBase.net 5.0 is aimed at turning companies' customer support centers into revenue-generating centers. As well, many of the new features and add-ons in Talisma KnowledgeBase.net 5.0 are designed to increase information accessibility and to further expand efficiencies in customer support centers.

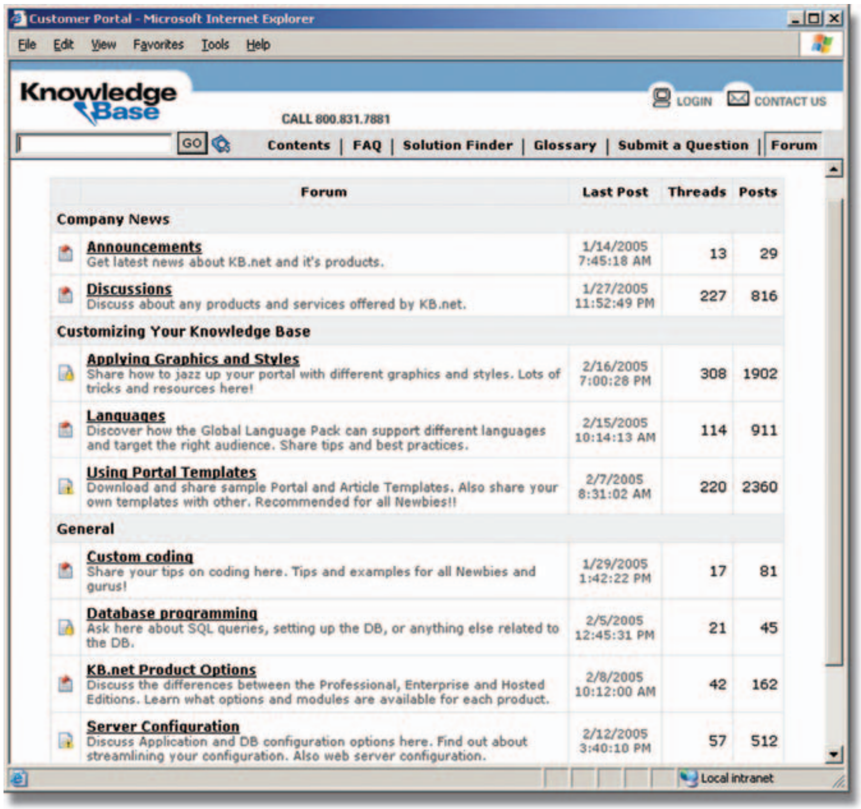
The KB Ad Manager, a new add-on module unique to Talisma KnowledgeBase.net 5.0, enables a company to present, track and report product offers, advertisements and promotions when knowledge base portal searches are conducted. KB Remote Search leverages all sets of content and expands organizations' searchable knowledge by enabling information to be searched for in disparate databases, external file systems and CRM systems via the KnowledgeBase.net search engine and portal.

Also new to Talisma KnowledgeBase.net 5.0, the KB Offline Portal and the KB Discussion Forum can enhance knowledge accessibility and sharing for Web self-service. Specifically, the KB Offline Portal (most suitable for sales and support employees in the field) allows end users to download and easily synchronize knowledge bases on their PDAs or laptops, enabling information to be found anytime, anywhere, even when offline. The KB Discussion Forum is a community discussion tool that allows searchable messages, threads and posts to be included as part of the Talisma KnowledgeBase.net portal for Web self-service. This new tool leverages individual expertise and is designed to improve knowledge sharing throughout an organization and among its end-user community.

The new offering also delivers more drill-down functionality.

KnowledgeBase.net 5.0 offers many other new and enhanced features. Suitable for organizations of all sizes, the offering is also available in a hosted version and two onsite versions.

http://www.talisma.com



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Company News			
Announcements Get latest news about KB.net and it's products.	1/14/2005 7:45:18 AM	13	29
Discussions Discuss about any products and services offered by KB.net.	1/27/2005 11:52:49 PM	227	816
Customizing Your Knowledge Base			
Applying Graphics and Styles Share how to jazz up your portal with different graphics and styles. Lots of tricks and resources here!	2/16/2005 7:00:28 PM	308	1902
Languages Discover how the Global Language Pack can support different languages and target the right audience. Share tips and best practices.	2/15/2005 10:14:13 AM	114	911
Using Portal Templates Download and share sample Portal and Article Templates. Also share your own templates with other. Recommended for all Newbies!!	2/7/2005 8:31:02 AM	220	2360
General			
Custom coding Share your tips on coding here. Tips and examples for all Newbies and gurus!	1/29/2005 1:42:22 PM	17	81
Database programming Ask here about SQL queries, setting up the DB, or anything else related to the DB.	2/5/2005 12:45:31 PM	21	45
KB.net Product Options Discuss the differences between the Professional, Enterprise and Hosted Editions. Learn what options and modules are available for each product.	2/8/2005 10:12:00 AM	42	162
Server Configuration Discuss Application and DB configuration options here. Find out about streamlining your configuration. Also web server configuration.	2/12/2005 3:40:10 PM	57	512

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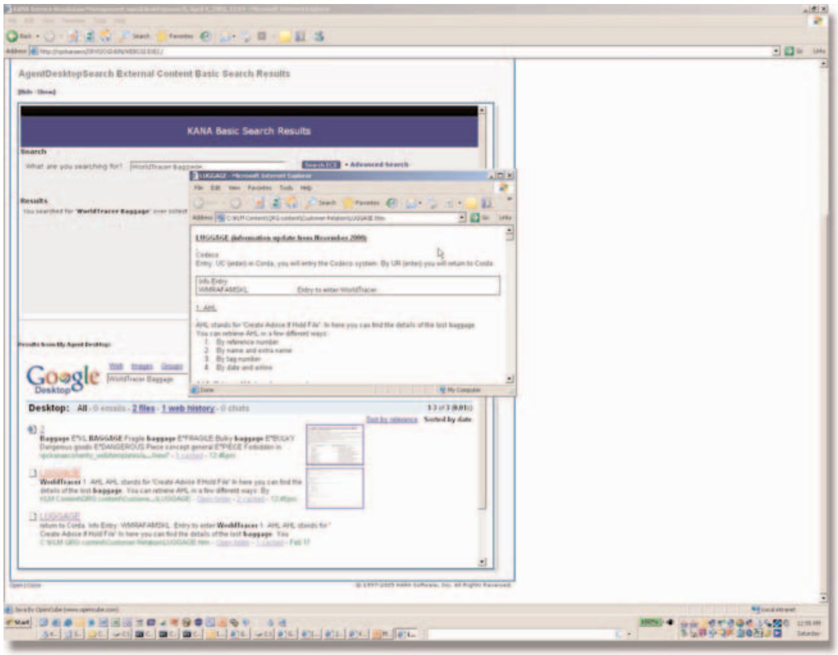
KANA Unveils Agent Desktop Search Solution

KANA Software, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of service resolution management (SRM) solutions, has announced KANA Agent Desktop Search. The new solution is for enabling integration between KANA Agent IQ, the company's contact center knowledge base, with leading desktop search applications. Additionally, agents can publish new data directly to the knowledge base with the click of a button. The combination of desktop search capabilities and the KANA Agent IQ database is designed to ensure agents have access to critical and timely information stored on the desktop directly from the knowledge base. KANA Agent Desktop Search allows agents to quickly search the stored information, and then submit it to be published in the knowledge base, helping result in faster and more accurate resolution of customer inquiries while reducing costs for the contact center.


AgentDesktopSearch External Content Basic Search Results
KANA Basic Search Results
Search
Results
Google Desktop
Desktop: All - 0 emails - 2 files - 1 web history - 0 chats
LUGGAGE

The integration of KANA Agent IQ and desktop search enables agents to continue working in the knowledge base while more seamlessly pulling information from their own desktop. Additionally, leveraging the "publish to IQ" function enables the agent to immediately and seamlessly add the data to the knowledge base once it is used, ensuring it can be shared across the contact center.

KANA Agent Desktop Search includes the following functionalities: quicker and easier access to custom documents not stored within the knowledge base; easier publication of information from the desktop to the knowledge base; a familiar user interface for the agent; and quicker retrieval of answers, resulting in more efficient service resolution.

http://www.kana.com

SAP Announces New mySAP CRM

SAP AG, (news - alert) a provider of collaborative business solutions, has announced the newest version of mySAP CRM, a culmination of enhancements to deliver new abilities across key business processes for the telecommunication, public sector and financial services industries, as well as key cross-industry business capabilities (e.g., service management, marketing resource management and mobile sales for handhelds).

Powered by the SAP NetWeaver platform, with embedded analytics and enhanced dashboard-like analytical applications, the new version of mySAP CRM focuses on assisting customers in enhancing user productivity by empowering users with a complete view of all relevant information from diverse enterprise systems to drive insight, decisions and cross-enterprise collaboration.

Cross-industry additions include the following: enhanced marketing capabilities; enhanced sales capabilities; and enhanced service capabilities.

Embedded analytics in mySAP CRM 2005 aim to bridge the gap between operational, collaborative and analytical processes for "role-relevant insight" (e.g., new account planning capabilities). Also, ease-of-use has been enhanced in order to boost productivity (e.g., a more intuitive user interface leveraging the enterprise portal, Web application and business intelligence capabilities of SAP NetWeaver).

Modular elements of mySAP CRM 2005 are currently being evaluated by customers. The complete and newest version will be globally available in October of 2005.

http://www.sap.com

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Fusion

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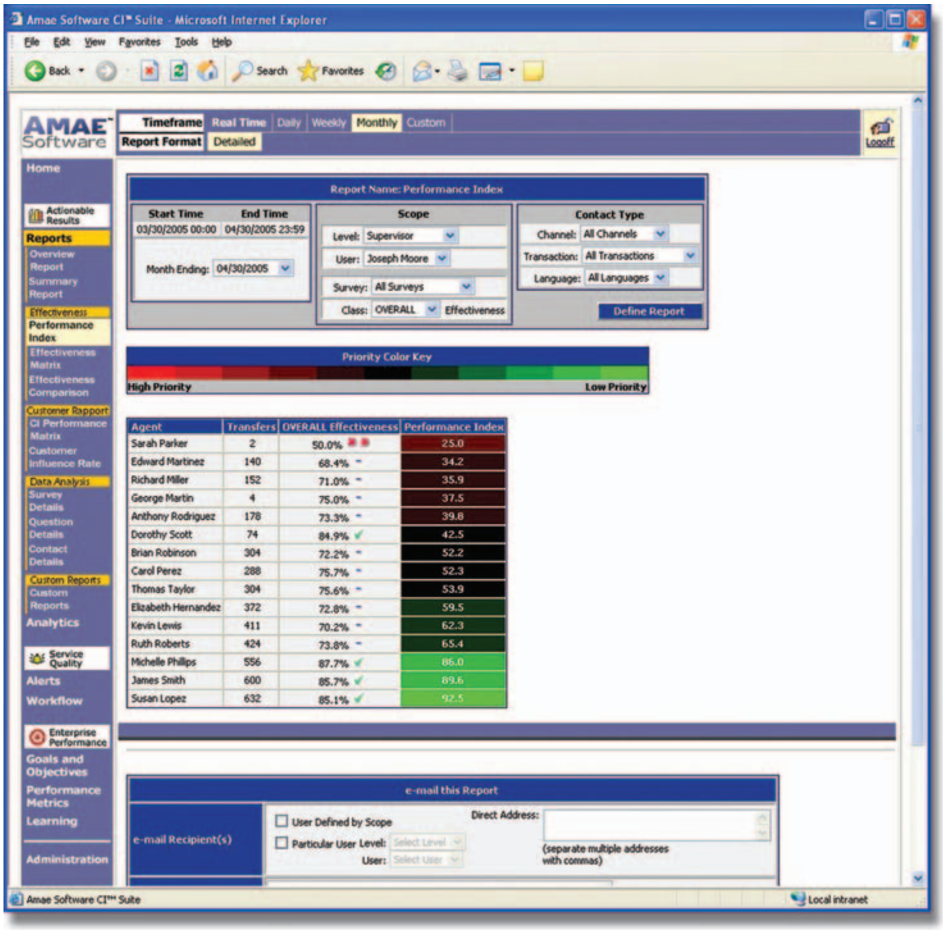
jacada

Amae Software Releases New Reporting Component Of CI Suite

Amae Software, (news - alert) a provider of a customer experience management (CEM) system with interaction and agent-level actionable information, has released a new reporting component within the Actionable Results Module of the Amae CI Suite. The newest component, the Performance Index, gives executives and management real-time performance rankings of customer-facing individuals, teams and facilities based on customer perspectives and any number of additional performance metrics. The Performance Index is designed to instantly identify areas for opportunity and attention within an organization. Then, using the organization's internal productivity metrics, QA scores and actual customer feedback at the agent level, the Performance Index can save time and dramatically simplify reporting and management activity. The Amae CI Suite is aimed at offering all features necessary to understand and improve the customer experience quality while lowering costs. Amae CI Suite collects customer perspectives in a way that builds customer loyalty, and integrates them automatically with relevant data, delivering an advanced level of customer analysis and reporting, alerts and goal measurement and performance to all levels in an organization, the company states.

http://www.amaesoftware.com


Amae Software CI™ Suite - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
AMAE Software
Logoff
Home
Actionable Results
Reports
Overview Report
Summary Report
Effectiveness
Performance Index
Effectiveness Matrix
Effectiveness Comparison
Customer Rapport
CI Performance Matrix
Customer Influence Rate
Data Analysis
Survey Details
Question Details
Contact Details
Custom Reports
Custom Reports
Analytics
Service Quality
Alerts
Workflow
Enterprise Performance
Goals and Objectives
Performance Metrics
Learning
Administration
Amae Software CI™ Suite
Local intranet

Timeframe: Real Time | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Custom
Report Format: Detailed

Report Name: Performance Index

Start Time: 03/30/2005 00:00
End Time: 04/30/2005 23:59
Month Ending: 04/30/2005

Scope
Level: Supervisor
User: Joseph Moore
Survey: All Surveys
Class: OVERALL Effectiveness

Contact Type
Channel: All Channels
Transaction: All Transactions
Language: All Languages

Define Report

Priority Color Key
High Priority — Low Priority

Agent	Transfers	OVERALL Effectiveness	Performance Index
Sarah Parker	2	50.0%	25.0
Edward Martinez	140	68.4% -	34.2
Richard Miller	152	71.0% -	35.9
George Martin	4	75.0% -	37.5
Anthony Rodriguez	178	73.3% -	39.8
Dorothy Scott	74	84.9% ✓	42.5
Brian Robinson	304	72.2% -	52.2
Carol Perez	288	75.7% -	52.3
Thomas Taylor	304	75.6% -	53.9
Elizabeth Hernandez	372	72.8% -	59.5
Kevin Lewis	411	70.2% -	62.3
Ruth Roberts	424	73.8% -	65.4
Michelle Phillips	556	87.7% ✓	86.0
James Smith	600	85.7% ✓	89.6
Susan Lopez	632	85.1% ✓	92.5

e-mail this Report
e-mail Recipient(s)
☐ User Defined by Scope
☐ Particular User Level: Select Level
User: Select User
Direct Address:
(separate multiple addresses with commas)

Witness Releases Enhanced Workforce Management Solution

Witness Systems (news - alert) has announced enhanced capabilities to its workforce management software (following the company's first quarter combined with **Blue Pumpkin Software**). The enhancements are available as part of the standard delivery for the company's prepackaged workforce management solution, which includes key performance indicator (KPI) scorecards and actionable learning. The company's inclusion of enhancements aim to further increase customer benefits through the following new capabilities: intraday management for improving planning; new configurable alerts, offering proactive results; advanced multisite management for delivery of more network control; renewed support for the Oracle database as further support of industry-standard databases; and easier upgrade management. Customers who have already deployed the company's robust workforce management software have a growth path to Witness' prepackaged workforce optimization solution, which includes workforce management software, along with performance management and e-learning capabilities. By fusing performance management and e-learning functionality with the workforce optimization anchor of workforce management, the company intends to provide customers with an entry point to a complete workforce optimization solution.

http://www.witness.com

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CosmoCom Announces UniFrame Offering, Integrated With Microsoft

CosmoCom, (news - alert) a provider of an all-IP, universal-access contact center system, has announced the availability of UniFrame, an integrated combination of the company's flagship CosmoCall Universe and **Microsoft**'s Customer Care Framework (CCF). UniFrame is CosmoCom's attempt at dramatically stepping forward contact center technology unification. Because today's entire contact center includes two main components — a communication platform and an information platform — unification, both within the many elements of each of these platforms and between these two main components, can reduce cost and risk associated with call center projects. CosmoCall Universe is an all-IP platform, of which its hallmark has always been the unification of the communication platform including the ACD, CTI, IVR, agent desktop, recording and reporting functions across all media and all channels. Microsoft Customer Care Framework creates an agile information integration and presentation framework that allows contact center agents to access service configuration and billing information in highly flexible and effective ways, no matter where and how that information is maintained.

"UniFrame is an easily integrated and cost-effective solution for customer care aimed at service providers, using Windows Server System as the carrier-grade server platform," said Michael O'Hara, general manager of the Communications Sector at Microsoft Corp., in a statement. "The solution combines CosmoCom's expertise in hosted contact centers and Microsoft Customer Care Framework to accelerate time to market and provide an overall lower-risk investment."

In integrating these two components to create UniFrame, CosmoCom has offered a contact center combination that can be advantageous in complex information application environments, and can improve the time and cost of contact center implementation and ongoing operation.

http://www.cosmocom.com
http://www.microsoft.com

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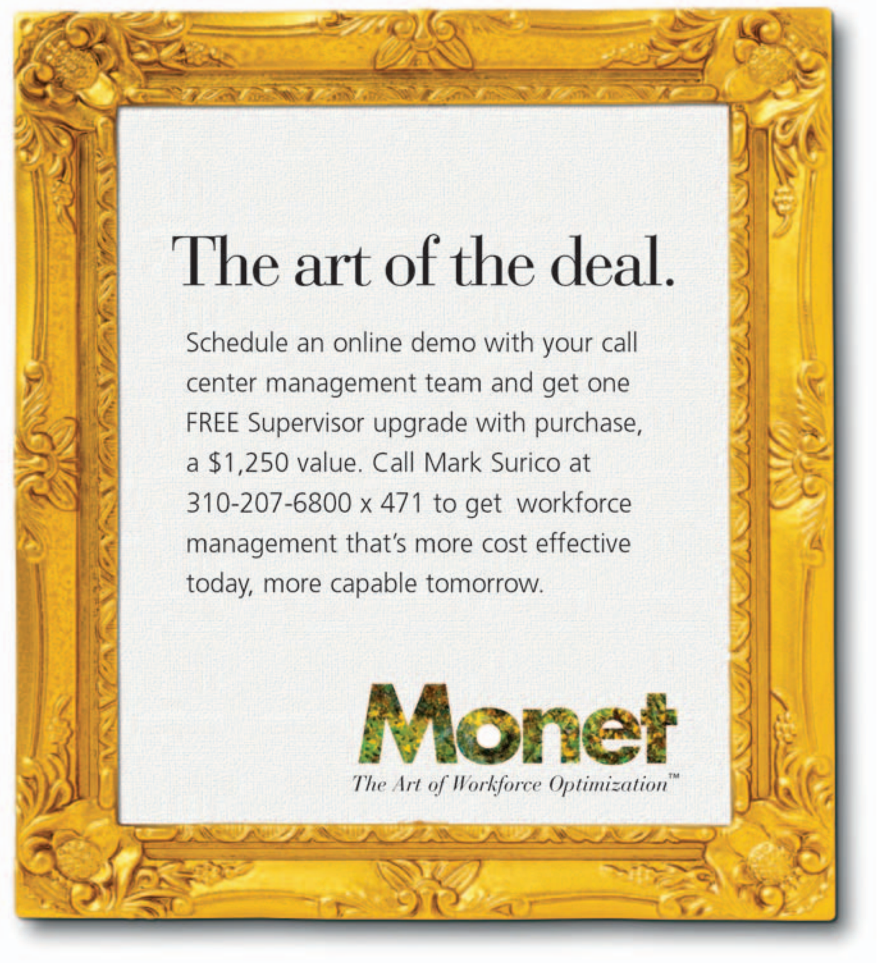
Whenever possible, please include high-resolution (minimum 266 dpi) color graphics (.BMP, .EPS, .TIF, or .JPG).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Schedule an online demo with your call center management team and get one FREE Supervisor upgrade with purchase, a $1,250 value. Call Mark Surico at 310-207-6800 x 471 to get workforce management that's more cost effective today, more capable tomorrow.

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The Art of Workforce Optimization™

Atos Origin, Loquendo Present New Interactive Virtual Assistant Solution

Atos Origin, (news - alert) an international information technology services provider, jointly with global speech technology company **Loquendo**, (news - alert) has presented its new Web-based self-service and multiple-channel applications in new conversational interfaces and interactive virtual assistants.

Atos Origin's new virtual assistants introduce the concept of emotional and social intelligence to virtual channels. They enable Atos Origin's clients to foster a "greater degree of humanity in their business relations" by providing a more flexible interaction that adapts to fit each client's specific business objectives. This new technology aims at offering more intelligence than that of the traditional self-service and virtual channel applications; making interaction easier; and guiding the end user by means of a lifelike dialog.

Atos Origin's new virtual assistants and conversational interfaces result from a combination of technologies, which include, among others, Loquendo TTS synthetic speech engine, Loquendo ASR (automatic speech recognition), complex Web programming, virtual reality design, 3-D graphic design and display.

The avatar's body language, expression and lip movements are synchronized following the pronunciation of each phoneme, consequent to the complete set of functionalities provided by Loquendo's multilingual TTS engine.

http://www.atosorigin.com
http://www.loquendo.com

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Atos Origin
Voice WORLD

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Atos Origin
Voice WORLD

noHold Announces Upgrades InstantSupport In v4.3

noHold, (news - alert) a provider of Web-based self-service solutions, has announced the release of InstantSupport version 4.3. InstantSupport is designed to provide technical support and sales organizations with the tools needed to automatically respond quickly and efficiently to customer questions. Instant Support's virtual agents are on duty 24/7 and deliver consistent, updated information and answers while providing ongoing customer behavior statistics. noHold customers use the solution to improve customer satisfaction, increase sales and reduce support costs. In addition to improved reliability, manageability and performance, new features in InstantSupport 4.3 include Asian language support; flexible CRM integration; and an additional user interface for allowing customers' internal support agents to search for solutions.

"This was not a simple upgrade; rather, it was simply a well-executed 'brain surgery' of our virtual agent engine and supporting framework," noted noHold VP of Engineering Felice Curcelli in a company announcement.

http://www.nohold.com

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Puerto Rico: The Ideal Contact Center Location.

Puerto Rico is the new choice for your contact center location. In Puerto Rico, you can enjoy the benefits and protection of operating within a United States jurisdiction with the added tax benefits of operating under a foreign tax structure.

An Operations Haven

- *Puerto Rico boasts one of the world's most sophisticated telecommunications systems.*
- *Our labor force is readily available, highly educated, computer literate and bilingual, to easily relate to your U.S and Latin American clients.*
- *Abundant real estate available at highly competitive rates.*
- *Federal and Municipal workforce assistance programs are available, as well as training and incentives packages.*

A Most Profitable Location

- *As Controlled Foreign Corporations, U.S. based contact centers generating income from offshore sources are subject to a tax rate ranging from 7%-2% with no withholding tax on dividends or distributions.*
- *200% deduction for investments in training.*
- *Accelerated depreciation of investments in plant and equipment.*
- *No import duties on call center equipment.*

Plus, you're on familiar ground, with U.S. monetary system, U.S. patent laws and regulations, and the security and quality of life you expect.

*To learn more about all the benefits Puerto Rico offers, visit our website at **www.pridco.com** or call 1-888-5-PRIDCO*

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Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company

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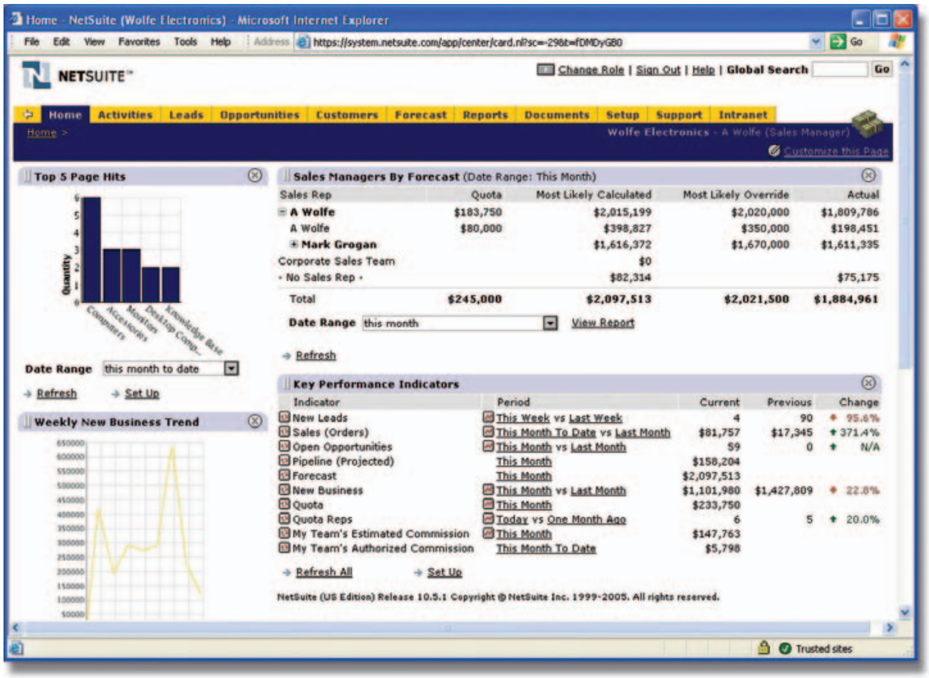
Puerto Rico

The advantages of going offshore. The security of being home.

NetSuite's New Hosted CRM Application Integrates Order/Partner/Incentive Management

NetSuite, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of integrated business application software, has launched NetSuite CRM+, a hosted CRM application that integrates order management, partner management, incentive management and project tracking. The application is designed to give growing businesses a 360-degree view of all customer interactions. The new application also offers eCRM, which includes Web site hosting, Web site analytics, customer portals, partner portals and partner management, all for making it as easy to sell and service customers via the Web as it is in person or on the phone. NetSuite CRM+ helps users automates the entire customer lifecycle — from a Web site visitor (i.e., a potential customer), to an interested lead, to a qualified prospect, to a customer who has actually placed an order, to servicing that customer and, finally, to guiding that customer to re-purchase. It manages the complete process from lead to prospect to customer in a single system, regardless of channel. It incorporates the corporate Web site into the selling process; and the system captures customer data natively, including customer purchases. The new NetSuite CRM+ further adds new functionality: order management; upsell/cross-sell; incentive management; project tracking; Web hosting and analytics; customer portal; and partner management.

http://www.netsuite.com


Home - NetSuite (Wolfe Electronics) - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File
Edit
View
Favorites
Tools
Help
Address
https://system.netsuite.com/app/center/card.nl?sc=-29&t=fDMDyGB0
Go
NETSUITE™
Change Role | Sign Out | Help | Global Search
Go
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Activities
Leads
Opportunities
Customers
Forecast
Reports
Documents
Setup
Support
Intranet
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Wolfe Electronics - A Wolfe (Sales Manager)
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5
6
Computers
Accessories
Monitors
Desktop Comp...
Knowledge Base
Refresh
Set Up
Weekly New Business Trend
650000
600000
550000
500000
450000
400000
350000
300000
250000
200000
150000
100000
50000
Trusted sites

Date Range: this month to date

Sales Managers By Forecast (Date Range: This Month)

Sales Rep	Quota	Most Likely Calculated	Most Likely Override	Actual
A Wolfe	$183,750	$2,015,199	$2,020,000	$1,809,786
A Wolfe	$80,000	$398,827	$350,000	$198,451
Mark Grogan		$1,616,372	$1,670,000	$1,611,335
Corporate Sales Team		$0		
- No Sales Rep -		$82,314		$75,175
Total	**$245,000**	**$2,097,513**	**$2,021,500**	**$1,884,961**

Date Range this month View Report

Refresh

Key Performance Indicators

Indicator	Period	Current	Previous	Change
New Leads	This Week vs Last Week	4	90	95.6%
Sales (Orders)	This Month To Date vs Last Month	$81,757	$17,345	371.4%
Open Opportunities	This Month vs Last Month	59	0	N/A
Pipeline (Projected)	This Month	$158,204		
Forecast	This Month	$2,097,513		
New Business	This Month vs Last Month	$1,101,980	$1,427,809	22.8%
Quota	This Month	$233,750		
Quota Reps	Today vs One Month Ago	6	5	20.0%
My Team's Estimated Commission	This Month	$147,763		
My Team's Authorized Commission	This Month To Date	$5,798		

Refresh All Set Up

NetSuite (US Edition) Release 10.5.1 Copyright © NetSuite Inc. 1999-2005. All rights reserved.

Salesboom Announces Multilingual Support In Web-Based CRM/SFA Solutions

Salesboom.com, (news - alert) a provider of on-demand CRM/SFA services, has announced the addition of multilingual support to coincide with its Salesboom.com v5.0 CRM release. The new Salesboom CRM improvements, already in effect, allow global users to type in any character set they desire, fully allowing users to store information in both their regional format and with accented and other special character types. Newly supported languages include French, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, German, Italian, Swedish and Dutch, amongst many others.

Salesboom currently has customers all over the globe, its strongest presence being in Central America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The new multilingual support for Salesboom.com's Web-based small business CRM software will allow users to enter records, such as contacts, leads, accounts or contracts, in multiple different character sets for numerous languages. This added support can help in transcribing regional information, such as names and addresses, in their proper and standard format, rather than necessitating English translation or removing accents.

The Salesboom multilingual CRM support enhancements have already been deployed to the Salesboom.com Web-based CRM/SFA software service transparently and seamlessly via the on-demand Internet.

http://www.salesboom.com

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EnvoyWorldWide Releases EnvoyConnect v.2.0

EnvoyWorldWide, (news - alert)a provider of enterprise notification services, has announced the availability of EnvoyConnect v. 2.0, the company's new campaign management tool. The EnvoyConnect suite has been enhanced to facilitate proactive automated outreach for a wide variety of customer care initiatives, including collections, renewal programs or new customer welcome plans. EnvoyConnect is a set of campaign management tools designed to enable organizations to make easier the implementation and management of automated outbound customer communication initiatives. Providing new personalization capabilities, EnvoyConnect enables voice messages to be professionally recorded and configured to include personal customer information, including account numbers and billing amounts owed; simultaneously, it provides message recipients with interactive capabilities to enable them to respond via keypad or voice or by transferring to live agents for transaction completion.

EnvoyConnect 2.0 provides new and enhanced features that include the following:

- **Delivery manager for agents**. Building on the ability to pace calls, thus avoiding overwhelming phone switches and PBXs, EnvoyWorldWide has extended this feature to calibrate inbound traffic according to agent availability.
- **Enhanced reporting**. Administrators can track import statistics in real time, can select reports through a self-service interface, and then receive granular detail and analysis on completed or still-in-progress campaigns.
- **Campaign management**. Administrators may stop, start or reset a campaign at any point in the process, or to any recipient on the contact list.
- **API enhancements**. New methods have been added to the patented SOAP API for ease of import and campaign management.

New features will immediately be made available to current EnvoyConnect customers.

http://www.envoyworldwide.com

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Siemens Announces v6.5 Contact Center Applications

Siemens Communications, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of convergent technologies, products and services, has announced Versions 6.5 of its HiPath ProCenter Agile and ProCenter Standard contact center applications, building further on the product portfolio whose demographic is small to large enterprises across numerous industry sectors.

Siemens' HiPath ProCenter V6.5 portfolio aims to enable enterprises to drive greater first-contact resolution of customer calls with faster call center administration, call processing and multimedia routing and reporting, including enhanced user and management visualization tools. Presence-driven and permission-based collaboration tools have also been extended to reach enterprisewide communication sources (e.g., telephone, e-mail and instant messaging).

The upgraded HiPath ProCenter Agile solution offers new features such as easy-to-implement e-mail management, scheduled callbacks and agents in multiple groups. It also provides integrated design capabilities for a basic IVR, as well as integration with Microsoft CRM.

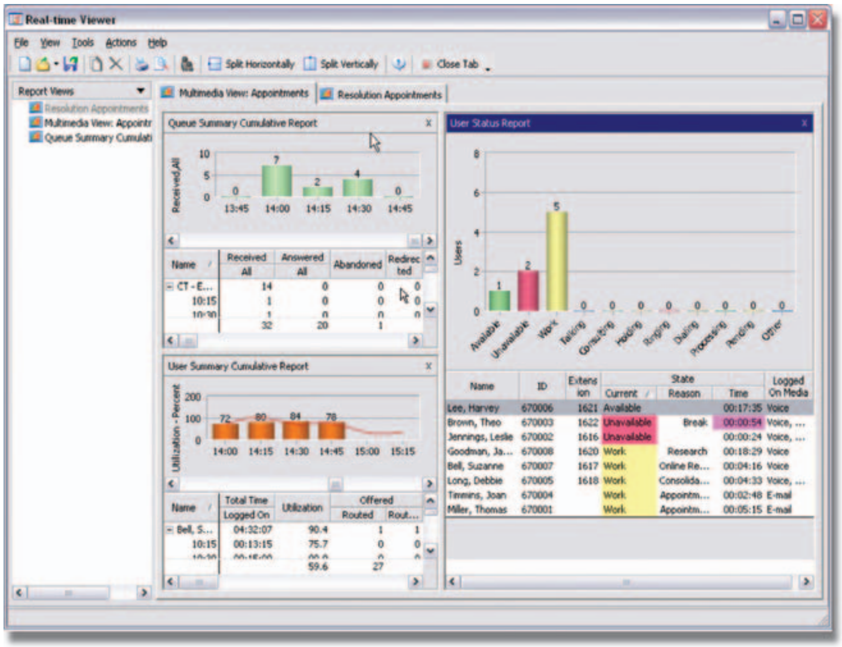
Agile can deliver intelligent call routing, graphical reporting and innovative productivity tools for agents and managers handling calls. HiPath ProCenter Agile includes an Associate Desktop that can facilitate enterprisewide collaboration and easily extend intelligent call routing features to employees who serve as overflow agents during peak traffic periods to ensure uniform response levels throughout the day.

The upgraded HiPath ProCenter Standard solution includes enhancements such as full IVR support, advanced multimedia skills-based routing and a software developer toolkit for vertical business process integrations. As with the HiPath ProCenter Agile, presence tools are integrated into the Standard's application desktop. Also, as needed, agents can quickly engage colleagues with the solution's one-click collaboration capabilities, whether in the office or remotely connected via an IP network.

The entire portfolio's Agent and Associate desktop interfaces have been redesigned with intuitive Windows-based GUIs to reduce training time. User operating flexibility includes "tear-off-and-park" toolbars and an integrated ticker-tape display of real-time contact center operational statistics, and now includes outbound and callback capabilities. A contact log automatically tracks the details of all inbound and outbound interactions and provides single-click callback for added productivity.

Both systems run in TDM, converged or pure VoIP infrastructures.

http://www.usa.siemens.com/communications


Real-time Viewer
File
View
Tools
Actions
Help
Split Horizontally
Split Vertically
Close Tab
Report Views
Resolution Appointments
Multimedia View: Appointr
Queue Summary Cumulati
Multimedia View: Appointments
Resolution Appointments
Queue Summary Cumulative Report
Received,All
10
5
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13:45
14:00
14:15
14:30
14:45
User Summary Cumulative Report
Utilization - Percent
200
100
0
72
80
84
78
14:00
14:15
14:30
14:45
15:00
15:15
User Status Report
Users
8
6
4
2
0
1
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5
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0
0
0
0
0
0
0
Available
Unavailable
Work
Talking
Consulting
Holding
Ringing
Dialing
Processing
Pending
Other

Name	Received All	Answered All	Abandoned	Redirected
CT - E...	14	0	0	0
10:15	1	0	0	0
10:30	1	0	0	0
	32	20	1	

Name	Total Time Logged On	Utilization	Offered Routed	Offered Rout...
Bell, S...	04:32:07	90.4	1	1
10:15	00:13:15	75.7	0	0
		59.6	27	

Name	ID	Extension	State Current	State Reason	State Time	Logged On Media
Lee, Harvey	670006	1621	Available		00:17:35	Voice
Brown, Theo	670003	1622	Unavailable	Break	00:00:54	Voice, ...
Jennings, Leslie	670002	1616	Unavailable		00:00:24	Voice, ...
Goodman, Ja...	670008	1620	Work	Research	00:18:29	Voice
Bell, Suzanne	670007	1617	Work	Online Re...	00:04:16	Voice
Long, Debbie	670005	1618	Work	Consolida...	00:04:33	Voice, ...
Timmins, Joan	670004		Work	Appointm...	00:02:48	E-mail
Miller, Thomas	670001		Work	Appointm...	00:05:15	E-mail

Line4 Announces Latest CTI Product Suite

Line4, (news - alert) a provider of contact center applications, has announced the release of the company's latest generation of computer-telephony integration (CTI) technology, aimed at bringing the small and medium-sized contact center market a cost-effective, simple-to-use CTI solution.

"ActionSuite has been designed as a simple-to-use system, allowing a contact center to migrate to a CTI environment quickly without having an in-house IT department," said Line4 CEO Dave Shanahan in a statement.

Line4's ActionSuite product suite is unique in the marketplace, according to the company, because of the superior value it provides its clients at a cost-effective price.

"With the ActionSuite family of products, we are able to offer this solution to contact centers with 20-250 agents," continued Shanahan.

http://www.line-4.com

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REAL TRAINING

REAL RESULTS

REAL FAST

SIVOX RealCall™

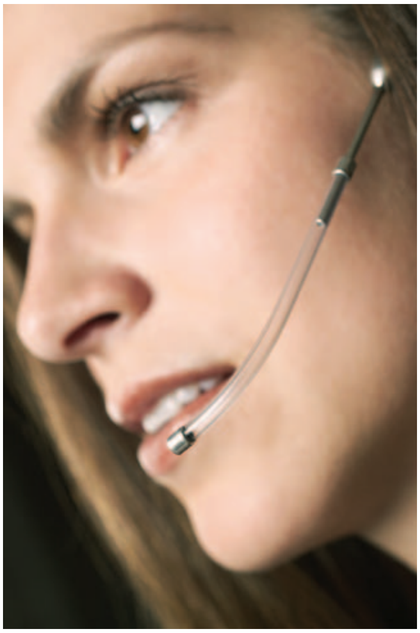
> *"With SIVOX's RealCall, operators can train at their desks, so training disrupts their work less and the voice recognition capabilities make the simulations compelling."*
>
> **The Gartner Group**

Benefits

- Reduce initial training time
- Increase agent performance
- Lower agent attrition
- Improve customer retention
- Reduce agent call time and system errors
- Enhance up-sell and cross-sell opportunities
- Build a consistent brand experience
- Decrease agent downtime
- Quick to deploy

Features

- Voice dialog simulation with speech recognition
- CRM/system screen emulation
- Visual Authoring tools (IDE)
- Role-based, scalable reporting



SIVOX Full Immersion™ Simulation Training is used by thousands of call center agents every week to decrease initial training time, increase selling opportunities, maintain compliance and increase productivity. With SIVOX RealCall, agents are fully immersed in life-like customer interaction sessions, with live feedback from the SIVOX RealCall coach. System and voice interactions are recorded and scored. Learning can be linked directly to performance metrics. Trainee progress can be monitored from a central management console, ensuring consistent assessment of your agent's use of quality practices. SIVOX RealCall can be implemented as a network training solution or deployed over the Internet as a full hosted ASP solution.

Real Performance Optimization

Regardless of your agent's skill level—from initial hire to seasoned call center pro—SIVOX RealCall can cut training costs, increase agent competencies and provide real, measurable performance increases. The SIVOX system is used in new-hire screening, initial training, compliance training, upselling optimization and certification—in short, for virtually any training and assessment need in your call center.

Optimizing People Performance℠

SIVOX

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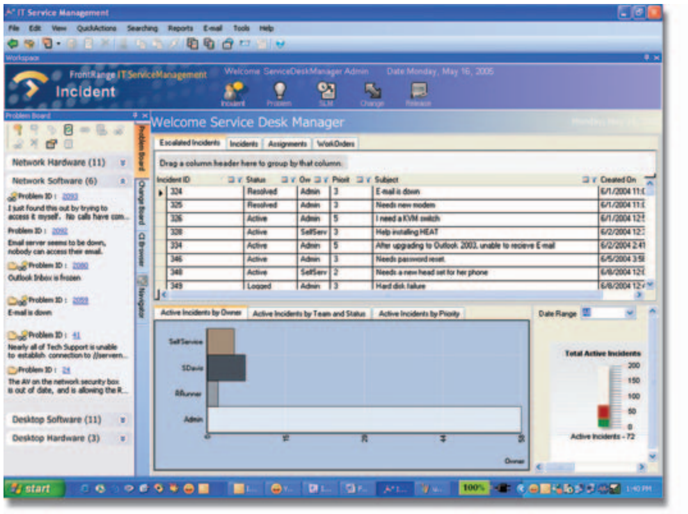
Customer Experience Management

FrontRange Offers Enhanced IT Service Management To Global Market

FrontRange Solutions, (news - alert) a provider of IT service management, voice application and CRM solutions for distributed enterprises, has announced extended global access of its modular IT Service Management (ITSM) solution with a new version and new languages. FrontRange's new release of ITSM 5.0.2 is designed to improve the performance of IT and support organizations for new customers as well as offer additional modules to increase functionality for HEAT customers. New updates to ITSM 5.0.2 include the following: localization releases in English, German, Polish and Russian (while Chinese and French will soon be available); dashboard enhancements offering real-time access to data to meet each user's specific needs; and enhancements to the Licensing Module for robust monitoring and license management.

http://www.frontrange.com


IT Service Management
File Edit View QuickActions Searching Reports E-mail Tools Help
FrontRange IT Service Management
Incident
Welcome ServiceDeskManager Admin
Date Monday, May 16, 2005
Incident
Problem
SLM
Change
Release
Welcome Service Desk Manager
Escalated Incidents
Incidents
Assignments
WorkOrders
Drag a column header here to group by that column
Problem Board
Change Board
CI Browser
Navigator
Network Hardware (11)
Network Software (6)
Desktop Software (11)
Desktop Hardware (3)
Active Incidents by Owner
Active Incidents by Team and Status
Active Incidents by Priority
Date Range
SelfService
SDavis
RRunner
Admin
Owner
Total Active Incidents
200
150
100
50
0
Active Incidents - 72
start

Incident ID	Status	Ow	Priorit	Subject	Created On
324	Resolved	Admin	3	E-mail is down	6/1/2004 11:
325	Resolved	Admin	3	Needs new modem	6/1/2004 11:
326	Active	Admin	5	I need a KVM switch	6/1/2004 12:
328	Active	SelfServ	3	Help installing HEAT	6/2/2004 12:
334	Active	Admin	5	After upgrading to Outlook 2003, unable to recieve E-mail	6/2/2004 2:41
346	Active	Admin	3	Needs password reset.	6/5/2004 3:5
348	Active	SelfServ	2	Needs a new head set for her phone	6/8/2004 12:
349	Logged	Admin	3	Hard disk failure	6/8/2004 12:

VoiceLog Announces Quality Call Monitoring Service, TargetQM

VoiceLog LLC, (news - alert) a provider of on-demand call recording and monitoring services, has announced the availability of its TargetQM service, a quality monitoring process that leverages speech analytics to target calls for evaluation.

TargetQM, powered by CallMiner, is designed to identify calls that meet a call center's specific quality objectives. VoiceLog Quality Agents then focus on the calls that provide the most relevant information to help agents improve their performance and better serve their customers (rather than listen to random samples). TargetQM was developed to address the need for statistical relevance in typical quality monitoring processes. TargetQM is designed to solve the problem of statistically insignificant quality samples by identifying calls with relevant content in a highly cost-effective manner. Using TargetQM with speech analytics, a significant sample of 100 calls per agent can be captured for about $10, then delivered to trained and experienced VoiceLog Quality Agents for further analysis and evaluation. (Clients can also use their own QA staff if they prefer.) The aimed result is attainment of more targeted evaluations that directly address call centers' key performance indicators for improvement.

http://www.voicelog.com

Peripherals

FB Corporation Releases Product To Relieve Call Center Agents' Lower Back Pain

FB Corporation, (news - alert) a manufacturer of back supports, has introduced *The Back Thing*, a low back support for call center agents. Designed to fit any chair and for any type of physique, The Back Thing is aimed at relieving low back pain and improving sitting comfort.

Statistics show that back problems affect at least 80 percent of the workforce; and sitting for extended periods is one of the major causes. *The Back Thing* supports the spinal muscles and prevents sitting in a slouched-over position, which over-stretches the spinal ligaments and strains the back, creating the discomfort.

According to the company, substantial savings can be obtained by employees using *The Back Thing*. In one call center's case, savings of $3,000 were achieved by less frequent chiropractic/HMO visits, reductions in medical and medication costs and improved morale and on-time work performance.

http://www.thebackthing.com

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Cepstral Announces Swift MRCP Text-To-Speech

Cepstral LLC, (news - alert) a speech technology company, has announced the release of standards-compliant Media Resource Control Protocol (MRCP) support for the Cepstral Swift Text-to-Speech System. The new product, Swift MRPC, will target IVR, VoIP PBX and other telephony voice applications.

Cepstral worked with **Innovative Engineering Concepts (IEC), Inc.**, a VXML platform provider, to provide MRCP platform support. The network transport standard is widely used throughout the telephony industry for pooling speech services; the architecture helps manage resources and minimize the per-channel costs associated with multiport systems.

"The Swift MRCP Server can intelligently manage TTS within a system comprised of multiple machines, call lines, operating systems, etc.," said IEC President David Lief.

The Swift MRCP Server is compatible with major telephony hardware and software, including the line of Intel voice boards, and standards-based VoiceXML gateways.

http://www.cepstral.com

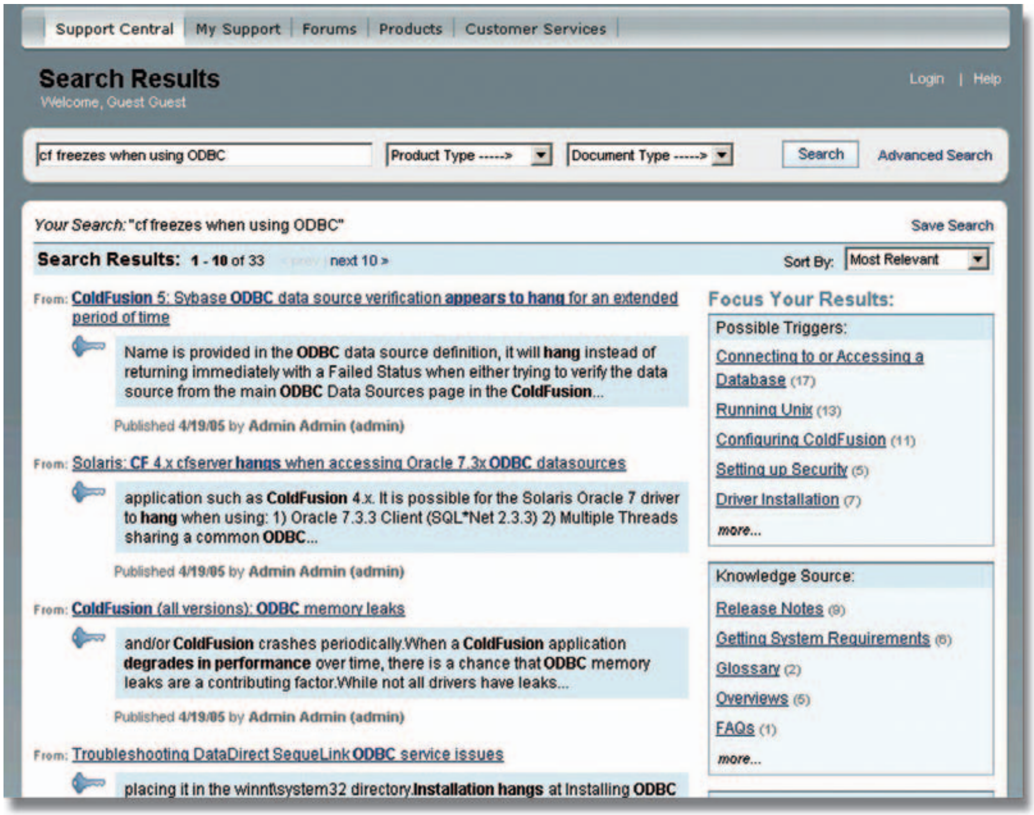
New Knova SRM Suite Highlights Search Ability

Knova Software, (news - alert) a provider of service resolution management (SRM) applications, has announced the general availability of Knova 6.5, the newest version of the company's application suite for automating the service resolution process across all customer service channels. Designed to reduce costs and to improve customer satisfaction, Knova 6.5 is highlighted by a new version of Knova's natural-language search engine, a core component of the Knova 6.5 Knowledge Platform. Knova 6.5 also features Knova Field Service, a new SRM application for mobile support professionals.

New and enhanced features of Knova 6.5 include the following: a next-generation search engine, featuring enhanced natural-language processing and contextual-proximity indexing that "leapfrogs competitive approaches"; Knova Field Service, a mobile support application that can enable field service professionals to resolve customer issues on-site; new authoring and content management features that support personalization and compliance goals; and extended international language support and localization capabilities for global deployments.

The next-gen search engine has been added for improved relevancy and resolution; the Field Service application, for powering remote, on-site service resolution; the rich content management, for enhanced personalization and compliance; and the improved internationalization, for supporting global deployments.

http://www.knova.com



Your Search: "cf freezes when using ODBC"

Search Results: 1 - 10 of 33 ‹ prev | next 10 ›

From: ColdFusion 5: Sybase ODBC data source verification appears to hang for an extended period of time

Name is provided in the **ODBC** data source definition, it will **hang** instead of returning immediately with a Failed Status when either trying to verify the data source from the main **ODBC** Data Sources page in the **ColdFusion**...

Published **4/19/05** by **Admin Admin (admin)**

From: Solaris: CF 4.x cfserver hangs when accessing Oracle 7.3x ODBC datasources

application such as **ColdFusion** 4.x. It is possible for the Solaris Oracle 7 driver to **hang** when using: 1) Oracle 7.3.3 Client (SQL*Net 2.3.3) 2) Multiple Threads sharing a common **ODBC**...

Published **4/19/05** by **Admin Admin (admin)**

From: ColdFusion (all versions): ODBC memory leaks

and/or **ColdFusion** crashes periodically.When a **ColdFusion** application **degrades in performance** over time, there is a chance that **ODBC** memory leaks are a contributing factor.While not all drivers have leaks...

Published **4/19/05** by **Admin Admin (admin)**

From: Troubleshooting DataDirect SequeLink ODBC service issues

placing it in the winnt\system32 directory.**Installation hangs** at Installing **ODBC**

Possible Triggers:
- Connecting to or Accessing a Database (17)
- Running Unix (13)
- Configuring ColdFusion (11)
- Setting up Security (5)
- Driver Installation (7)
- *more...*

Knowledge Source:
- Release Notes (9)
- Getting System Requirements (6)
- Glossary (2)
- Overviews (5)
- FAQs (1)
- *more...*

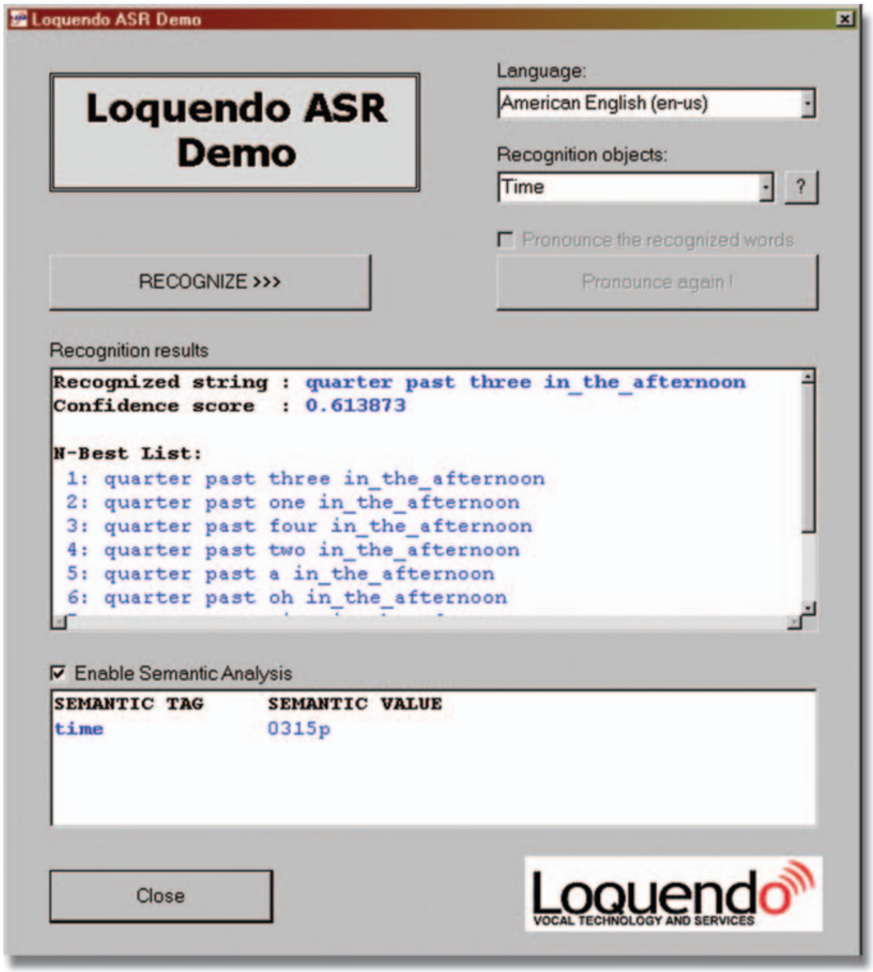
Cisco, IBM Plan To Deliver New Speech-Enabled Self-Service Solutions

IBM (quote - news - alert) and **Cisco** (quote - news - alert) have announced the two companies' joint plan to deliver speech-enabled self-service solutions to contact centers by combining IBM's WebSphere Voice Server product and Cisco's Customer Voice Portal.

The solutions would combine IBM's integration and application infrastructure software and speech technology with Cisco's IP communications, focusing on self-service speech applications, which together are aimed at enabling easier deployment of customized speech applications that enhance the customer experience. By using IBM WebSphere Application Server middleware, the solutions would allow contact centers to leverage open standards, including Voice XML and J2EE. Combining Cisco's Customer Voice Portal with IBM's WebSphere infrastructure software would also enable enterprises to incorporate speech into a range of functions. These include customer service, sales and marketing, human resources and inventory management.

The IBM/Cisco offerings will be designed to let businesses extend enterprise-class speech self-service to remote locations across both IP and non-IP networks. The combination of Cisco Customer Voice Portal with IBM WebSphere Voice Server for Multiplatforms provides businesses with a single integrated platform upon which to develop a new generation of speech applications.

http://www.cisco.com
http://www.ibm.com



Language: American English (en-us)

Recognition objects: Time

☐ Pronounce the recognized words

Recognition results

```
Recognized string : quarter past three in_the_afternoon
Confidence score  : 0.613873

N-Best List:
 1: quarter past three in_the_afternoon
 2: quarter past one in_the_afternoon
 3: quarter past four in_the_afternoon
 4: quarter past two in_the_afternoon
 5: quarter past a in_the_afternoon
 6: quarter past oh in_the_afternoon
```

☑ Enable Semantic Analysis

```
SEMANTIC TAG       SEMANTIC VALUE
time               0315p
```

Loquendo Announces Optimized Speech Recognition Performance With Loquendo ASR 6.6

Loquendo, (news - alert) a speech technology company, has announced the release of Loquendo ASR 6.6. This new version of the Automatic Speech Recognition engine assists in enabling a more powerful use of speech recognition for voice application development. Loquendo ASR is a next-generation speech recognition technology the makes possible the creation of automated voice solutions that are "accurate, flexible and robust, even in the noisiest of environments."

Following are some of the new features included in Loquendo ASR 6.6:

- The barge-in functionality has been significantly improved as regards speech input detection to allow the interruption of text-to-speech playback. The major enhancements integrate a variety of technologies to better discriminate user speech from noise or background speech, and to guarantee a quick and reliable response.
- Loquendo ASR now ships in a variety of tiers, providing integrators with greater licensing flexibility.
- The compilation process of very large grammars has been further optimized.

Loquendo ASR offers a wide range of available languages. Upon request, certain languages can be provided as a single module.

http://www.loquendo.com

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Autonomy Enters Agreement To Acquire etalk

Autonomy Corporation plc, (news - alert) a provider of infrastructure software for the enterprise, has announced it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire **etalk Corporation**, (news - alert) a provider of enterprise-class contact center products, for a purchase price of $70 million, payable in a combination of cash and Autonomy ordinary shares, with an opportunity to earn additional consideration payable in Autonomy ordinary shares upon meeting and exceeding certain future performance-related targets. The completion of the transaction is expected to occur in the third quarter of 2005; it is subject to various approvals, closing conditions and the admission of the new shares. Combined Autonomy and etalk products are expected to be generally available within a quarter.

http://www.autonomy.com
http://www.etalk.com

Envox Expands Professional Services Initiative

Envox Worldwide, (news - alert) a global provider of voice solutions, has announced the expansion of its Professional Services initiative, an initiative put forth to further assist companies in their move to open, standards-based voice solutions, including those based on speech technologies, VoiceXML, voice over IP (VoIP), Host Media Processing (HMP) and Web services. The company's Professional Services Group is available to assist enterprise customers, service providers and voice solution developers in the design, creation and deployment processes for all types of open, standards-based voice solutions, including interactive voice response (IVR), enhanced self-service, automated directory assistance, alerts and notifications, call center and carrier service solutions. The Envox Professional Services Group will also create customized voice solutions and integrate them with the existing telephony, data and back-office environments companies already have in place.

http://www.envox.com

EADS TELECOM North America Now Named Aastra Intecom

EADS TELECOM's (news - alert) North American commercial information networks division, which provides enterprise telephony and contact center solutions, is now operating as **Aastra Intecom** in the U.S. This name, effective immediately, combines Aastra — which markets and sells telecommunications products globally — with the Intecom name — which reflects more than 22 years' of history in the industry.

http://www.aastraintecom.com

InfoCision Aims Newest Call Center At Hispanic Community

InfoCision Management Corporation, (news - alert) a provider of inbound and outbound marketing, has recently opened a new call center in Youngstown, Ohio, calling the teleservices company's newest center "an *oportunidad perfecta*" (perfect opportunity) for the needs of the local Hispanic community and many of the company's partner clients.

"As the population of bilingual Americans continues to rise, it is important for businesses to incorporate that trend into their short- and long-range plans," Silvia Hauber, InfoCision's director of human resources and herself a native of Columbia, said in a company statement. The call center provides jobs to the Mahoning Valley's Hispanic population, which is greater than the state average. InfoCision works closely with the Organizacion Civica y Cultural Hispana Americana, Inc. in Youngstown for staffing purposes.

http://www.infocision.com

StarTek Names New President, CEO

StarTek, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of business process outsourced services, has announced that its board of directors has named **Steven D. Butler** as the company's president and CEO. The board has also elected him as a director of the company.

Butler, 45, has served since January 3, 2005, as executive vice president and CFO, and since February 18, 2005, as interim CEO of the company. Prior to joining the company, he was a financial consultant engaged in private practice; served as CFO of Verado, Inc.; and as managing director of finance and treasurer of United Pan-European Communications N.V.

http://www.startek.com

Macromedia, Premiere Global Announce Strategic Partnership

Macromedia, (quote - news - alert) a Web communications provider, and **Premiere Global Services**, (news - alert) a provider of business communications services and business process solutions, have announced a strategic partnership for a new, integrated teleconferencing service with Macromedia Breeze. This partnership will join together Premiere Global Services' business communications services with the Web conferencing capabilities of Macromedia Breeze 5 to deliver a unified Web communications solution for customers worldwide. The partnership between Macromedia and Premiere Global Services is intended to provide a powerful service for both companies' customers who are seeking audio and rich visual Web components. Breeze 5 customers can now control audio and access flexible conference calling directly within the Breeze meeting room interface, while Premiere Global Services clients can tap into these Web communications to enhance their audio conferences.

http://www.macromedia.com
http://www.premiereglobal.com

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vCustomer Names New President, COO

vCustomer Corporation, (news - alert) a provider of business process outsourcing (BPO), CRM and technology support services, has announced that it has named **Wesley T. O'Brien** to the newly created position of president and chief operating officer (COO). He will oversee all of vCustomer's operations worldwide, reporting directly to **Sanjay Kumar**, vCustomer's founder and CEO. O'Brien most recently served as president of CPR Consulting. Previously, he was president and COO of Precision Response Corporation; and before that, he was president and CEO of Trescom International. O'Brien also served in a variety of executive capacities at MCI, Inc. for 12 years.

http://www.vcustomer.com

WebEx, Salesforce.com Integrate

WebEx Communications, (news - alert) a Web conference provider, has integrated its Sales Center service with that of hosted CRM provider **Salesforce.com Inc**, (quote - news - alert) extending the range of the sales force automation application. This means Salesforce.com subscribers will be able to launch online sales calls from within Salesforce and automatically populate the meeting with relevant customer and sales team data. It will also mean customers can be supplied with personalized portals designed to help engage the customer during the sales process. The two companies said the integration will enable organizations to unite customer data and interactions within the same application, allowing customer interactions to be managed as part of the sales processes. The WebEx Sales Center service also includes a "sales floor" management feature, enabling managers to track and analyze activity to help improve sales effectiveness. WebEx has carried out the integration to link its backbone with the Salesforce.com sforce platform, using its partner's Web services API to hook into sforce. Access to the WebEx application is via a tab within the CRM service, enabling the management functions to be accessed; however, WebEx meetings can also be initiated directly from relevant Salesforce functions such as appointment or account screens.

The two vendors will continue to host their respective services and store related data, but some data will be shared between the two applications. WebEx plans to deepen the level of integration over time, such as the ability to take notes during meetings and action items that could be stored in Salesforce.com activity records.

http://www.webex.com
http://www.salesforce.com

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Customer Inter@ction Solutions'

Sixth Annual CRM Excellence Awards, Part I

For the sixth consecutive year, the editors of *Customer Interaction Solutions* dared readers to prove that their companies have what it takes to win the coveted CRM Excellence Award. Below is Part One of the winners — the companies that offer the best and the brightest customer relationship management products and services, all to the benefit of their clients. Winners were chosen on hard data: quantifiable results that convinced us, without a doubt, their clients were infinitely better off with these companies' products and services than without.

Congratulations to the winners!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the very large volume of award applications we received, the CRM Excellence Award winners will be presented in two parts, to be continued next month in the July 2005 issue of *Customer Interaction Solutions*.

CRM Excellence
TMC®
Award
2005

Aplicor
Aplicor CRM
http://www.aplicor.com

"The client, an Internet and network services provider, selected the Aplicor CRM solution. Leveraging Aplicor's 'Rapid Results' implementation methodology, and leveraging the configurable nature of the product, the client's sales and customer management processes were quickly modeled or enhanced in Aplicor (news - alert). Within the first 30 days, sales staff and account managers were able to utilize the Aplicor system in a production environment. By the end of the second month, the implementation was complete and the client was fully utilizing account and contact management, lead management, opportunity management with sales forecasting, marketing management, customer support and a mix of library reports and data warehouse analysis reports. The company experienced a decrease in average sales cycle elapsed time from 111 days to 98 days; a verifiable increase in 'closable' pipeline volume of 18 percent after three months of use; an average ticket revenue size increase of approximately nine percent; and a sales conversion rate increase of approximately eight percent."

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Citrix Online
Citrix GoToAssist 6.0
http://www.citrix.com

"Before the client (quote - news - alert)implemented GoToAssist, traveling directly to the client was the only way to effectively install the client's software. There were so many variables that came into play during an installation that [the client] needed to be on-site to install it appropriately. Traveling took valuable personnel away from the office for an extended time and the trips were costly, necessitating airfare, hotel and other expenses. Since implementing GoToAssist, the client has significantly reduced travel costs and shortened troubleshooting time. In addition to the travel savings, support-team productivity is higher because issue resolution is so much faster with GoToAssist. GoToAssist helped the company's support team react rapidly when troubleshooting client systems. With just a few clicks, a support technician can see what the client sees. The company can show clients how to use an application or the clients can just fix the problem themselves. GoToAssist has helped resolve issues more quickly and has aided in educating clients on how to use the client's software more efficiently. Since implementing GoToAssist, the client company has been able to provide faster support and keep costs at the same level even though its call volume has increased."

ClientLogic
ClientLogic Integrated & Personalized Customer Service Program
http://www.clientlogic.com

"The client (news - alert), an Internet service provider, formerly had a rebate-processing provider that struggled with manual data entry, slow processing times and poor bank reconciliation reporting. In order to use rebates as a way to increase customer sign-ups and to make a positive first impression, ClientLogic developed a fully integrated and personalized rebate-processing program for the ISP. In a mere 60 days, ClientLogic launched an innovative item-processing program to handle the ISP's customer gift cards and rebates. ClientLogic began by collaborating with the ISP to alter the rebate form itself to maximize scalability and minimize manual data entry. This new form, coupled with ClientLogic's high-speed imaging and scanning technologies, enabled cutting the rebate turnaround time from 8-to-12 weeks to 5-to-7 days. It also boosted data accuracy and consistency, enabling the client to deflect costs and prevent customer complaints."

Cross Country Automotive Services
Tow-To
http://www.crosscountry-auto.com

"At the two-year mark, thousands of our client's (news - alert) (a leading automotive service chain) customers have utilized our customer-focused service. Specifically, the program has enabled our client to interact with customers more than 175,000 times since inception, supporting the mission of becoming the full-service, after-market service provider to its customers. Overall customer satisfaction levels exceeded 96 percent. And service work order revenue has increased by more than 500 percent since program inception. Due to the success of this program, our client has turned to Cross Country Automotive Services to develop a roadside assistance program for its customers to further its mission of providing full service, whether in the shop or on the road."

Eagle IP LLC
EagleACD
http://www.eagle.net

"As a result of the EagleACD solution, the client (news - alert) has developed a flexible call center platform to manage its call-handling capacity. During the last 11 months, it has resulted in an improved service level and their operating costs have gone down. And the EagleACD's 'pay-as-you-go' features have helped to eliminate payments for idle time of call center agents. The client explains another benefit: 'EagleACD's skills-based routing finds the right agent among all the agents connected to the network. This allows us to optimize staffing and increase service quality for a better ROI — creating a more efficient company and a more productive call center. No over-staffing is required due to this high reliability. This reduces operating costs for delivering services.'"

Empirix, Inc.
Hammer Service Assurance for Siebel
www.empirix.com

"The client (news - alert), a Fortune 100 brokerage firm using both Siebel and Genesys applications, had a goal of using Empirix Service Assurance for Siebel to ensure the company's upgraded system would be stable and scaleable, and that performance would be at least as good, if not better than, its previous setup. It also needed to ensure that no functionality was lost during the transition. An Empirix team, along with the brokerage's IT staff, performed the testing in December 2004 with experts from both Siebel and Genesys standing by. The test was conducted during off hours on a portion of the production infrastructure. During the test, the call load was ramped up to correspond to the firm's expected peak load for that portion of the application — approximately 200 simultaneous inbound calls being served by 200 agents. All facets of the system performed flawlessly."

Epicor
Epicor Clientele CRM.NET
http://www.epicor.com

Since implementing Epicor (quote - news - alert)Clientele CRM.NET, the client, a provider of travel assistance and international medical insurance, has seen improvements in its day-to-day operations through the flexibility of the solution and the ability to share information across the enterprise. The client reports, "A lot of our service agreement and care facility information was not available in our previous system. With the Epicor solution, we are able to put external documents like contracts right in the system where they are easily and

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quickly accessible." The client also reports, "Using Clientele we are able to capture critical metrics, such as client utilization, which helps us in our strategic planning. We can also respond quickly to new business opportunities. The rapid development capabilities enabled through the .NET architecture enable us to get new partners set up in our system quickly so we can start doing business."

eTelecare Global Solutions
Proprietary CRM Package
http://www.etelecare.com

"eTelecare (news - alert) Global Solutions was able to offer the client, a leading wireless provider, a variety of customer touch points where other vendors were not. The flexibility, accuracy and speed of our service helped to increase conversion rates, to cut costs, to reduce the number of representatives needed on the program, and to improve customer satisfaction and service quality across the board; through the effective use of CRM, we were able to achieve a 90 percent cost reduction for business reply card processing on a per-transaction basis and an 80 percent reduction in IVR transactions compared to their internal costs. The convenience of the business reply card we designed was proven through its use — more than 50 percent of all renewals were received via BRC. Another 10 percent were handled via IVR. Both approaches cut program costs considerably."

IEX
TotalView Workforce Management Version 3.8
http://www.iex.com

The client (news - alert), a large mobile services provider, saw its contact centers' conformance improve instantly with the introduction of the TotalView Real-Time Adherence (RTA) module. Within weeks, the client began averaging 99 percent schedule conformance. As a result, service levels have improved dramatically. The client reports, "Our contact center is meeting or exceeding service goals." It also reports that it now gets 80 percent of its calls answered in 20 seconds, with a one percent abandon rate. By using TotalView for flexible scheduling, the company reported reducing overhead costs by five percent to eight percent. Instead of having agents sit idle during shift changes, they now plan meetings, training and coaching sessions during periods of high availability. They can also spread vacation throughout the year more easily, which has helped reduce overtime expenses.

KANA
KANA IQ
http://www.kana.com

Through its implementation of KANA IQ (news - alert), the client, a financial services company, has fulfilled three key customer service objectives: 1) Transform customer service — KANA IQ has significantly increased first-call resolution rates and cut hold times by consistently offering customers the insights of the most experienced specialists in the company; 2) Improve service reps' productivity — KANA has enabled the client to develop a multiskilled service team, which can provide advice on a wide range of products and brands, without needing extensive retraining; and 3) Cut contact center costs — KANA IQ has created highly productive, multiskilled teams, enabling the client to support greater call volumes without increasing staffing levels.

Maximizer Software
Maximizer Enterprise 8
http://www.maximizer.com

For the sales reps at the client company (a software provider), Maximizer (news - alert) Enterprise CRM is providing them with access to critical data at the click of a button. The system also met the client's goals of reducing the time per transaction and of better reporting on customers. The client reports: "Overall, Maximizer Enterprise has provided significant improvement in sales rep productivity with a 20 percent across-the-board time savings, as well as 23-hours-a-week time savings on reporting and forecasting from a business unit." As for the future, the client plans on rolling out Maximizer Enterprise to more than 100 users, with plans to open up the portal to resellers and partners, as well.

MEDFONE, Inc.
Centralized Appointment Desk for Network of Community Health Centers
http://www.medfone.com

The client, a county department of health services, selected MEDFONE (news - alert) to develop and implement a centralized appointment desk to manage its large telephone call volume. Currently, MEDFONE is successfully managing more than 1,000 calls per day for 11 communities' health centers in the county. Ninety-two percent of the inbound calls received generate appointments. MEDFONE has 10 full-time agents dedicated to this account. By working with MEDFONE, the county has been able to free up its staff to work more efficiently in its health centers and clinics. Additionally, the client did not have to hire additional personnel to handle the calls. MEDFONE also provides the client with customized reports that detail call volume statistics and call information, so county personnel can manage their facilities more efficiently.

Proficient Systems Inc.
Proficient*Sales Server*
http://www.proficient.com

"The client (news - alert), a national bank, exceeded its business case by 47 percent within seven months of staffing its Online Chat Team with dedicated Agents. In addition to monetary returns, the bank's use of proactive online chat has positively impacted customer retention and customer satisfaction ratings. Survey feedback indicates that the bank's customers enjoy banking online and are extremely pleased with the assistance they receive from the bank's Online Chat Agents."

Sage Software (formerly Best Software)

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ACCPAC CRM
http://www.bestsoftware.com

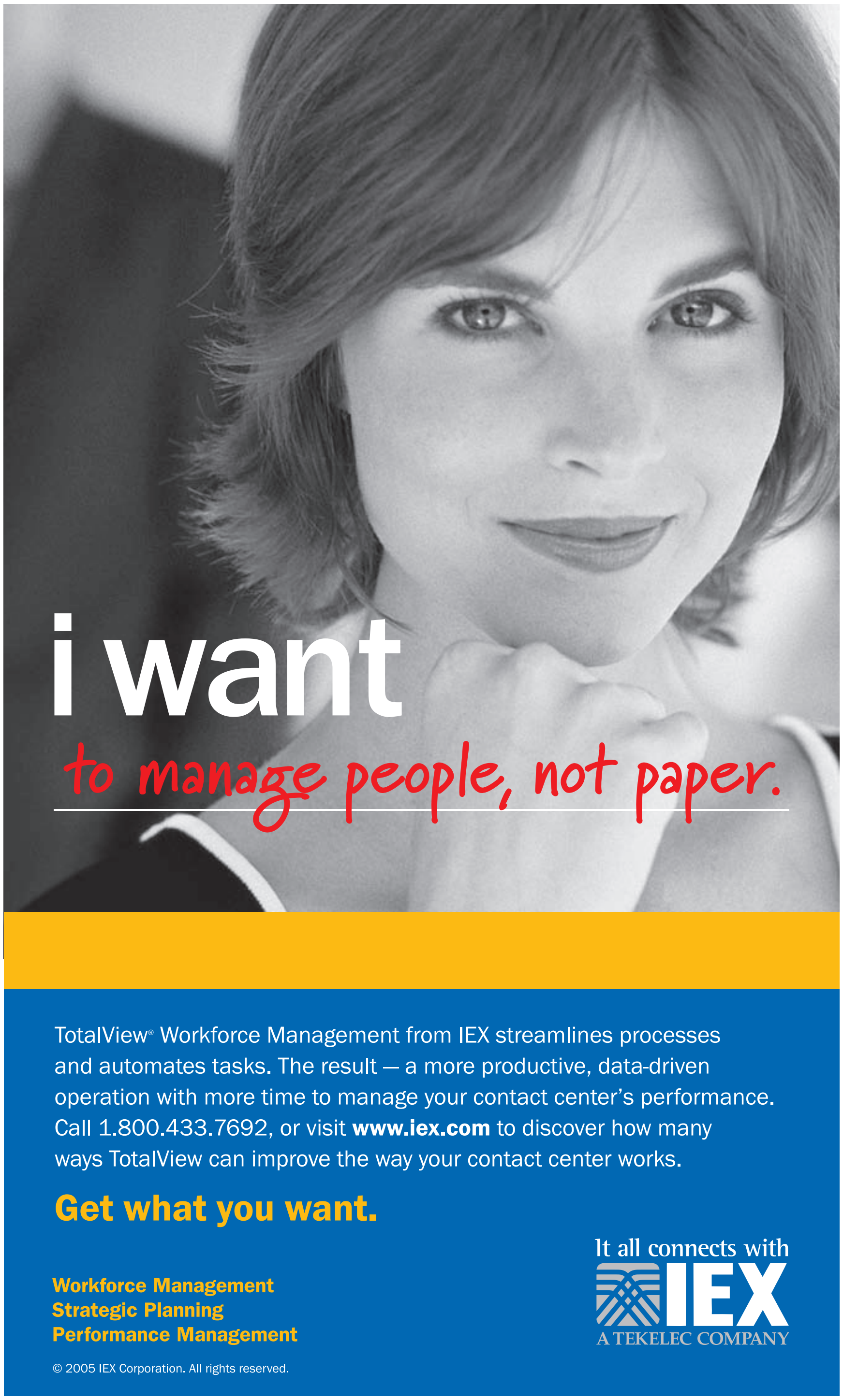
"Until deployment of Best Software's ACCPAC CRM (news - alert), Enterprise Edition, complaints coming into the offices of a national newspaper were simply faxed over from the Wisconsin call center to the newspaper's main office, and taken care of by hand, a time-intensive and error-prone process. Making extensive use of the customization and escalation features in the ACCPAC CRM customer care/support module, now when a fax is sent by the Wisconsin call center, a record is also written to the newspaper's ACCPAC CRM database in an ancillary temporary file. This file is checked every five minutes for additions, and when a new record is found, it is imported into ACCPAC CRM as a new, unassigned case. The escalations find the new case, and using another ancillary cross-reference table, are assigned the proper user I.D., and an on-screen reminder is also provided to the customer service representative (CSR)."

salesforce.com
Salesforce Summer '05
http://www.salesforce.com

The client (news - alert)— a provider of electronic payment solutions for merchant point-of-sale and Internet transactions — reports: "We customized Salesforce to import leads directly from a new Web portal where the banks enter them. Previously, all leads were faxed in for time-consuming manual processing. Before Salesforce, it took us 24 hours to process a new lead and get back to the merchants; today, we can promise a two-hour turnaround. That kind of responsiveness is a phenomenal benefit both to the merchants and to our customer banks."

SAS
SAS Marketing Automation
http://www.sas.com

The client (news - alert), a popular interactive baseball fan Web site, gets sophisticated reporting capabilities and the newest generation of predictive analytics for state-of-the-art data management and data discovery capabilities. From that information, teams gain an exhaustive understanding of their fans' desires for anything baseball — even when they're away from the ballpark. By combining data from the Web site with data gained from ticketing partners, the client uses SAS to predict what fans want from the Web site and its other offerings, as well as from their favorite teams, which makes their relationship with baseball even more meaningful.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With SAS, the client can look at real-time customer behavior against longer-term data and know what the customer is most likely to be interested in next. That way, the site can offer customers appropriate promotions or opportunities.

The SAVO Group
Sales Asset Manager (SAM)
http://www.savogroup.com

Before implementing SAM, the client (news - alert) had a limited view of activity on both the sales and marketing sides of the business. While high-level information about customer contact was available (i.e., which account manager met with which customers and when), it fell short of detailing the nature of the meeting, products/services discussed and outcome. And marketing management had virtually no information about what materials were being used, how frequently, with which customers, and whether they were successful in advancing relationship growth objectives. SAM's robust, intuitive reporting tools deliver all of this and more, providing previously untracked analytics about customer contact and sales asset use, from a macro level (e.g., companywide activity in a specific time period) to the very micro (e.g., usage of a single presentation slide).

Siemens Communications, Inc.
Siemens HiPath ProCenter and HiPath IPortal
http://www.icn.siemens.com

The client (news - alert), a cable entertainment and broadband services provider, sought to improve productivity, to reduce costs and to turn its customer service from "good" to "great." The client acquired the HiPath ProCenter Advanced application's multimedia suite, which integrates e-mail, Web, IVR and outbound calling capabilities. Since deploying the Siemens solution, the company has seen call volumes to agents drop from 11,500 a week to about 9,000, with the difference made up of callers who are either using the IVR to get account balances or using the automated payment feature. With the new performance reporting capabilities, the client is able to separate customer calls from all call traffic, something they weren't able to do before, and measure call handling time among a range of performance indicators.

TeleTech
TeleTech On Shore And Off Shore
http://www.teletech.com

"In 2001, TeleTech (news - alert)established an onshore 'staging area' in Enfield, Connecticut, in the heart of the Northeast insurance corridor. After 18 months' of operations, TeleTech successfully transitioned the less-complicated calls to its Manila (Philippines) center and backfilled Enfield with the more-complex interactions. By January 2004, TeleTech was taking 100 percent of all provider calls and meeting or exceeding all client metrics. Over three years, the program has grown from 60 to 240 customer service representatives (CSRs)."

Voxify
Voxify Automated Agents
http://www.voxify.com

The client (news - alert), a large hotel chain, reports that it is pleased that cost improvements came along with the service improvements. The company's VP of Reservations had this to say: "This is the first time in my career that I've been able to improve service and costs simultaneously. The ongoing savings are phenomenal. An Automated Agent call saves 85 percent over the cost of a live agent call. The more calls we take with Automated Agents, the more we save. We recouped the up-front investment in Automated Agents in less than two months." Now that the first two Automated Agents have proven so successful, the hotel chain is in the process of deploying Automated Agents to book, confirm and cancel reservations, and to service calls regarding the hotel's loyalty program. Once the additional Automated Agents are deployed, they will serve 45 percent of the hotel's callers from greeting to completion.

Witness Systems
Workforce Management from Witness Systems' Workforce Optimization Solution
http://www.witness.com

The client (news - alert), a provider of interactive communications and entertainment services, reports that using Witness Systems' technology gained the company the ability and agility to take on much larger competitors by transforming its customer contact center into a source of competitive advantage. With the ability to balance forecasting and scheduling, service quality, costs and employee satisfaction, the client's contact center has redefined service quality and has helped the company effectively compete against the incumbent cable operators. The client's post-implementation results include a 19 percent boost in productivity; realized annualized revenue gains of more than $750,000; increased service levels by 121 percent; improved service level consistency by 71 percent; reduced call abandonment rates by 31 percent; greater employee satisfaction and retention; and more effective operations.

Z-Firm LLC
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http://www.zfirmllc.com

The client (news - alert), a software company, implemented SalesLogix as its companywide CRM solution. To address its faxing and shipping needs, identified as areas for potential time savings, the client implemented FaxRush and ShipRush Server. With FaxRush, approximately 40 employees at the client company's sales and support departments were able to tap into SalesLogix to send faxes from their desktops. With FaxRush handling its faxes, the client sends anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 faxes every week — significantly more than it could send before. With ShipRush Server, the client processes shipments right from SalesLogix. When sales reps log an order in the CRM application, the shipping team uses SalesLogix to process the shipment using ShipRush Server. Because all order details and contact information are already in SalesLogix, there is no need to copy or duplicate data.

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Simulation Training: The Power Of Continuous Performance Optimization

The Current State Of Call Centers

There are more than 160,000 call centers in operation worldwide. These centers are facing increasing challenges, including globalization, the need for more knowledgeable call agents, pressure to reduce training costs and rapid acceleration in call volumes. Add to this the necessity to attract and retain highly skilled employees, and there is a critical need for more effective and efficient training of call center employees.

The rise of call centers is directly tied to the increasingly competitive need to provide better customer service. Corporations have learned that better service not only keeps customers happy, but can also provide additional sales revenue in post-sales customer calls. Greater customer satisfaction and increased revenue are predicated on efficient, highly trained call center agents, however. Yet the turnover rate among call center employees may run as high as 70 percent a year in some industries.

Furthermore, call centers cannot transfer knowledge fast enough, for as markets, products and services rapidly change, new training must be implemented quickly yet thoroughly. For example, a leading telecom provider company changes 70 percent of its call center scripts every seven weeks. Add to this the industry-acknowledged attrition rate of call center professionals of 40 percent to 90 percent per year, and the need for rapid and thorough training of representatives on the front line of call centers becomes crucial to survival.

Call Center Training Requirements

In order to reduce costs and increase agent performance, call centers must adopt new technologies for quicker and more efficient agent workforce training. These software solutions must be interactive, specific to each organization, quickly deployed and rapidly adapted, with ongoing feedback to monitor individual trainee progress.

Research indicates that learners retain more information when they are interactively involved with the content. Passive learning, in fact, such as classroom training, is the least effective. Furthermore, passive learning is the least cost-effective in terms of hours, manpower and facilities. A Datamonitor, Inc. survey reports that while nearly half of all organizations still view their call centers as "cost centers," nearly a third (32 percent) expect these same call centers to generate profits through contextual selling on behalf of the agents. These contextual selling skills require more product knowledge and more experience than current turnover rates allow.

By Wade Baker
Sivox Technology Inc.

Call Center Costs

Two-thirds of contact center costs are related to agents, with the total costs to train new agents estimated to be $15 billion per year, according to Friedman, Billings, Ramsey & Co. Inc. Here is the business problem contact center operators face:

- Ninety-two percent of consumers form their image via the contact center;
- Two-thirds of costs are related to agents;
- 30 to 60 percent agent attrition;
- Cost to recruit and train a new agent is $10,000;
- Nearly 1.5 million new agents are recruited and trained each year in North America;
- Total annual cost of recruiting and training new agents exceeds $15 billion; and
- One percent reduction in turnover equals $500 million annual savings.

Simulations As Business Solution

While there has been a massive deployment of contact centers over the

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past decade, the efficiency levels with these hubs have lagged. As contact center operations become paramount, contact centers are expected to seek solutions for improving agent retention and customer satisfaction. E-learning simulations are emerging as critical software solutions with proven capabilities to help contact centers do a better job of reducing turnover and improving both customer and agent satisfaction.

Enterprises that have invested in e-learning have told Gartner that their biggest payback occurs when they include simulation as part of their overall e-learning curriculum. Gartner tells its clients that workforce optimization software suites for contact centers will emerge in 2005, providing the basis for optimizing the performance of the contact center and its agents. According to Brandon-Hall, simulation is now the most critical characteristic of the next generation of e-learning products and services, with domestic revenues of e-learning simulations projected to increase from $300 million in 2002 to more than $6 billion in 2006.

As a broad range of industries feel the effects of, and conform to, the realities of a highly competitive global economy, contact center managers are under increasing pressure to generate greater value and performance from their agents. Given that approximately two-thirds of contact center costs are agent-related, companies are demanding and increasingly implementing solutions that reduce agent cost and generate increased agent output. Moreover, use of business-focused learning simulations systems will increase to support internal and external compliance initiatives, as well as new government regulations, as simulations are needed to train users on new technologies, corporate policies and operating principles.

Actual Call Center Training Today

Among most call center training facilities today, the use of e-learning and software-based simulations is still in its infancy. In order to train new customer service representatives (CSRs), most training centers rely on role-playing with mentors/coaches and on software system training before introducing the CSR to live customers. Even in the most advanced facilities, wherein software simulations seek to recreate the CSR-to-customer experience, the simulations are static — restricted to tight scripts that provide no immediate feedback to the trainee.

The reason for call center reliance on mentor/coach and peer-to-peer role-playing is obvious — the coach can provide the trainee with immediate feedback and suggestions. The coach can point out what went wrong in the role-playing and make concrete recommendations for improvement. Unfortunately, this one-on-one training is costly, time-consuming and inefficient; how many hours does it take for one human coach to role-play with each trainee? Are peer role-playing exercises useful? Can a coach be available to train one-on-one with existing CSRs as they adopt new products and services and need additional training? In peer-to-peer role-playing, the results are only as good as the weakest “player” in the training. Peers can never deliver consistent messages and in-depth knowledge of best practices. This last criteria — consistency — is especially problematic when deploying peer role-playing throughout a training facility. Effectiveness is questionable, and the outcome never measurable.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of dynamic, interactive one-on-one training is the ideal in any learning environment. It dramatically improves retention of key concepts; it boosts confidence and competence; and it provides the trainers and coaches with immediate feedback on the CSRs’ progress.

Software simulations and e-learning are today being deployed throughout numerous facilities in an attempt to address both the effectiveness of coaching and the inefficiencies of using live mentors. Unfortunately, most software-based solutions have yet to encompass the most powerful aspects of mentoring — its dynamic ability to provide on-the-spot feedback and assessment.

Enterprises that have invested in e-learning have told Gartner that their biggest payback occurs when they include simulation as part of their overall e-learning curriculum.

In addition, e-learning and simulation development tools fall into roughly two development environment categories: boilerplate, general-purpose soft skills training modules to be used as is; or templates and toolboxes for building simulations from scratch, often using proprietary tools with a limited ability to integrate with existing IT infrastructures.

Static Simulations vs. Dynamic Simulations

By definition, *static* means *unchanging*. Most static CSR software simulations use canned customer calls or strictly scripted lessons. The trainee is expected to “play along” with the script. The CSR is scored and graded by completing this static scenario, and no interaction occurs between the trainee and the simulated customer (script). In fact, the trainee, in many cases, isn’t even expected to respond to the scenario — is expected to merely watch as it plays out. While this is an entirely rote and, therefore, limited exercise, the trainee nonetheless does gain some experience with “hearing” a typical customer example and applying the expected language to it. The simulation does not actually hear or understand what the CSR is saying during the session, though, and as a result, the simulation system can provide no qualitative feedback to the CSR during, or even after, the simulation. Many base their evaluations on completion of simple multiple-choice quizzes.

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A *dynamic simulation*, in contrast, adapts to changes during the session. To closely mimic, as much as possible, a live coaching session, a dynamic software simulation system must actually "hear" what the trainee is saying, consequently responding accordingly with suggestions. In addition, a dynamic system will steer the trainee along the optimal, best practices path during the simulation, rather than routinely play itself out. Finally, the system must track trainee progress throughout the session — at key junctures — for meaningful evaluation to occur.

Dynamic Simulations For Continuous Performance Optimization

While immersive, interactive simulations have proven themselves in the field for initial agent training at many companies, the reach and the utility of dynamic simulations both extend far into the call center. Simulation development should not be restricted to initial training. Areas in which organizations may find on-demand, desktop training delivery of use:

- New-agent training;
- New-offer training and upselling;
- Compliance and regulatory training; and
- Agent certification.

Call centers today are subjected to intense pressures to deliver new product and service offerings through their existing customer contacts. On-demand delivery of simulation training to existing agents allows organizations to carry out on-the-fly training, and make new service and product offerings more rapidly and efficiently.

As regulatory restrictions are introduced, companies may roll out compliance and testing to the existing agent pool much more quickly and effectively than one-on-one training. If a company ties its training to quality monitoring software, results can be achieved most effectively.

As agents mature, moving up and through the ranks, certification is key to performance optimization within the organization. Dynamic simulations can help streamline and validate an agent's increased performance and skill levels.

Rapid changes in business and the workforce are driving an increased requirement for real-time knowledge transfer and improved customer response in call centers worldwide. These changes include high personnel turnover rates, running in excess of 40 percent of call center employees, combined with an acceleration of employee knowledge requirements. Performance optimization has become CRM's latest calling card. The Datamonitor Report shows a growing trend in using e-learning technology to make the CSR more efficient and productive.

One of the most efficient and cost-effective strategies is to enable the transformation of agent center training through the use interactive simulation software. Unlike traditional role-playing and classroom training, which is costly, time-consuming and inefficient, a dynamic simulation development platform for best-practices training and agent productivity enhancement, based on true-to-life data system screen entry and customer dialogs, serves agents' needs regardless of their role in the organization — from initial training to professional certification. **CIS**

Wade Baker, CEO of Sivox Technology Inc. (news - alert) (http://www.sivox.com), has spent 20 years building high-technology companies. From 1996 to 2001, he was the president, CEO and a director of Payback Training Systems, Inc., (now known as Avaltus), a market player in the content publishing and dissemination of vertical libraries for the provisioning of e-learning solutions to diverse industries. SIVOX provides interactive simulation training, with installations in over 50 call centers employing tens of thousands of agents who use the technology daily to improve call center performance.

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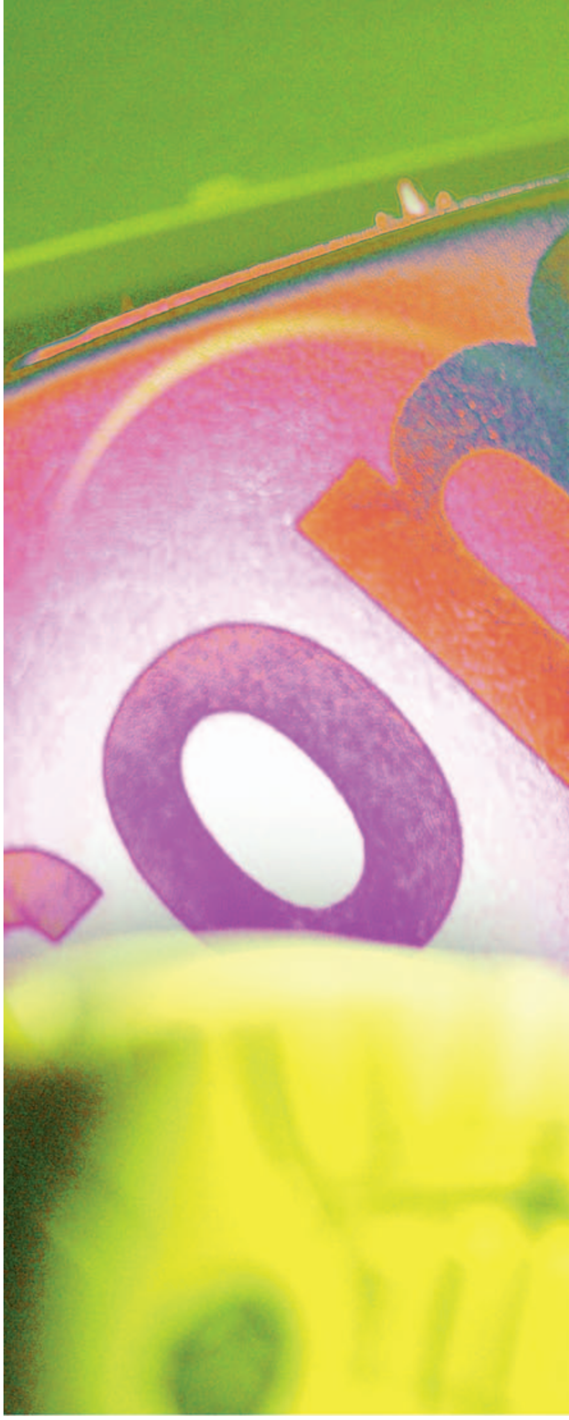

Fix It Now: Using On-Demand E-learning To Stop Bad Habits

E-learning has gained momentum in call centers as a tool that is used in conjunction with classroom-based training to keep agents' skills at the level required to meet customer service goals. While most e-learning is delivered on a scheduled basis to train agents in generic topics, ranging from new procedures to how to handle a disgruntled customer, a new and complementary model is emerging that can be used to correct the specific performance deficiencies of individual agents as soon as they are identified. This strategy is known as *on-demand* e-learning.

By Henry Lach
Syntora

In contrast to the traditional definition of "on demand" that would suggest a system allowing agents to select e-learning courses as they see fit, "on demand" in this context refers to something much more useful: the ability to automatically dispense short e-learning courses to agents whenever individual performance metrics in a given area fall above or below a pre-defined threshold. With this method, agents can receive highly targeted training designed to remedy their unique performance problems on a "right now" basis.

This "nip-it-in-the-bud" approach to improving agent performance is a welcome addition to the call center manager's arsenal of performance-enhancing tools. It can be used as an adjunct to scheduled e-learning to help improve overall call center performance, decrease agent turnover, and leverage a call center's existing investment in e-learning technology.

Five-Minute Fixes

While scheduled e-learning is a practical method for delivering new information such as product rollouts, shipping policy changes or enhanced service offerings to the entire agent population, on-demand e-learning is tailored to individual agent weaknesses and tied directly to each agent's performance as measured by the call center's performance analytics software. It proactively leverages the performance metrics already being gathered to provide a system that not only flags unsatisfactory work habits but also provides corrective training before excessive damage is done.

Simply put, on-demand e-learning involves automatically delivering the right information to the right agents at the right time. It can be activated when an individual agent has a problem such as:

- Average talk time increasing by more than 20 percent over a two-week period;
- Month-to-date utilization falling below a minimum standard;
- Quality monitoring scores falling below a minimum standard;
- Low sales volumes;
- Poor promises-kept ratios;
- Or any agent-specific metric that is being measured within the call center.

If an agent fails to meet the thresholds set by the call center manager or supervisor, an on-demand e-learning system can issue an alert advising the

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agent that he or she is out of compliance on a given task and must take a five-minute remedial training course to address the problem. The system can be configured to instruct the agent to take the course immediately, in the next 24 hours, or at any time of the manager's or supervisor's choice.

Key Components

Different on-demand e-learning systems have different features, but in general these systems require four components that work seamlessly with each other. These are:

- **E-learning content** — electronic-based educational material typically developed by the training manager for delivery to an agent's desktop.
- **Learning management system** — software that organizes e-learning content into reusable courses, assigns courses to agents, and then reports on their e-learning activity, including quiz scores.
- **Performance analytics software** — software that gathers all the performance metrics from the various telephony, business, call monitoring and scheduling systems upon which the call center operates.
- **Rules engine** — the piece of the puzzle that glues everything together, making it possible to automate the delivery of e-learning content based on agent performance.

Training managers define the rules that will trigger content delivery and then instruct the system which content to deliver when. Tests can be attached to the end of each course to assess the agent's understanding of the material. Additional rules can be developed to alert the agent or the training manager if the problem persists. If that happens, the training manager can provide personal instruction to attempt to resolve the situation.

Multiple Benefits

One of the chief benefits of on-demand e-learning is that it can help offset problems caused by the decline in training being experienced by most call centers in the ongoing struggle to reduce operating costs. According to a recent benchmarking study commissioned by Dimension Data, a specialist IT services and solution provider, investments in agent training have fallen significantly in recent years despite a continuing broadening of call centers' responsibilities.

"The length of agent induction training has fallen steeply from 36 days in 2003 to just 21 days today," according to the study. "The ratio of coaches to agents in contact centers is equally worrying and stands at 1:46. Yet to achieve best-practice levels of six coaching hours per agent per month, the ratio should be at least 1:25." The result is "growing customer impatience and decreased satisfaction" — both consequences that are hazardous to any call center's health.

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These problems are exacerbated by the fact that only 16 percent of contact centers have a dedicated coach while 74 percent assign training responsibilities to team leaders, based on the study's findings. On-demand e-learning can help take up the slack in both financial and personnel resources committed to training by serving as a virtual coach. It can simultaneously keep costs low by eliminating the need to increase team leads and coaching staff to manually intervene.

Another benefit relates to the ability of on-demand e-learning to help reduce agent turnover and thereby minimize the costly two-week-or-longer process of training new hires.

The relationship between training and agent retention has been clearly documented in a study by the Olsten Corporation, a company that provides staffing services to multinational companies. The study found that contact centers that implement a specific training regimen for at least one month have an annual turnover rate of 20 percent, compared with 55 percent for those with less training. While the study did not specifically measure the impact of on-demand e-learning, the same principle applies: more training equals more successful agents who tend to stick around longer.

Training also has other commonly accepted benefits. In a sales environment, for example, investing in ongoing sales training will directly increase close rates. Providing agents with new product information increases first-call resolution and decreases the costs associated with callbacks. Better-trained agents provide better customer service, which customers view as a significant differentiator in a competitive market.

According to a recent benchmarking study investments in agent training have fallen significantly in recent years despite a continuing broadening of call centers' esponsibilities.

On-demand e-learning can help in all of these areas by providing a new and cost-effective channel for helping agents polish their skills. It is a logical extension of scheduled e-learning. It provides highly targeted training designed specifically to strengthen an individual agent's areas of greatest weakness. It can cure agent performance problems before they cause widespread harm to call center operations.

Most important, it can help drive agent productivity improvements even in the face of constrained corporate budgets. It's like having a personal coach for each agent without the salary — and a useful antidote to dwindling training budgets. **CIS**

Henry Lach is president of Syntora Inc. (http://www.syntora.com), a provider of agent productivity software for contact centers.

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INNOVATIVE IDEAS FROM THE
TELESERVICES EXPERTS

West Corp. Can Help You Maximize Customer Service Savings By Using VoIP

By Steve McCoy, Director, Strategic Technology Planning

For years, VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) has been a hot topic in the business community. Experts touted the eventuality that replacing normal telephony connections with Internet-based connections would revolutionize telecommunications by allowing companies and consumers alike to ditch their local and long-distance providers, saving millions of dollars in the process.

The advantages of VoIP (define - news - alert) also extend to the customer contact center. For example, a traditional domestic telephony call may be routed through several contact and data centers before being routed to a contact center offshore. However, a call entering an IP port can be routed directly to that end point at a much lower cost.

So why hasn't this revolution fully happened yet? First, it is taking time to develop the technology to the point wherein it can be a viable replacement for all elements of TDM voice technology. Second, despite the fact that large corporations are typically the earliest adopters of new technologies for enhancing productivity and reducing costs, many companies are reluctant to swap their current phone networks for VoIP because the overall industry is still young. Those conducting VoIP deployments successfully are doing so gradually, enabling VoIP at various levels of their networks under stringent testing and performance-level guidelines.

Will VoIP Eventually Replace TDM Phones?

VoIP has the potential to replace the current TDM system for three reasons: 1) VoIP protocols support higher quality at lower cost; 2) Huge amounts of excess broadband capacity are currently going unused; and 3) Most companies currently support separate voice and data systems. By replacing traditional phone systems with VoIP, companies can consolidate two network systems into one.

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Partnering with West (quote - news - alert) enables you to take advantage of the cost savings offered by VoIP while minimizing your investment risks. Even those companies that manage their own contact centers can profit from West's VoIP experience through the company's hosted solution that allows companies to manage their own applications and drive calls to their own agents.

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In the accompanying article by West's Steve McCoy, the question is proposed: "Why hasn't this revolution fully happened yet?" Also noted is, "despite the fact that large corporations are typically the earliest adopters of new technologies for enhancing productivity and reducing costs, many companies are reluctant to swap..." The question and the statement both are posed regarding VoIP technology, but both are relative to numerous other technologies in this industry.

Speaking with technology-products providers on a constant and consistent basis, it's come to pass that one learns things about companies that they wish not to be made publicly known. Example: A software company develops a fantastic and reliable product; it is used for a large corporation's online self-service; and that corporation has been pleased with the implementation and results; but due to the corporation's strict secrecy within itself, or just years of traditional company policy, this complete satisfaction with the product and its results cannot or will not be made as public as it could; public as in reaching all companies in the market (i.e., potential buyers).

And yes, smaller companies do shy away from technologies they don't yet fully grasp in understanding. But once an influential company announces it actually uses this technology with satisfactory results, others will follow, as if after the proverbial Pied Piper. This is not to say companies should implement a technology based on popularity, but consider that it may be popular because it IS so good.

At trade shows and in press releases, there is more validity to a product, to editors at least, if there is a presence of someone who uses the product and is willing to offer a first-hand show of satisfaction. We know the company that created the product thinks it is the best; but what of the day-to-day user; a representative from a company that actually uses the product and is genuinely pleased with it?

Sure, there are plenty of case studies for us as resources of customer experiences, but for major corporate entities using the technologies to go out of their way, stand up and very publicly address their pleasure, be it at trade shows or in press releases or the provider's statements...well...it doesn't happen as often as it should. If you're the Piper, don't let the end users down by slowing progression and adoption because of bureaucracies and fears of perception.

David R. Butcher, Assistant Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

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TMC Labs has built a solid reputation in the VoIP, contact center and IP telephony marketplaces. Based on the philosophy of professionalism and unbiased, in-depth education—coupled with respected product reviews—TMC Labs is THE leader in its field.

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The Real Case For The Home-Based-Agent Model

In recent years, there has been a rapidly increasing level of interest in the use of agents working from home as an alternative to the traditional, facilities-based call center approach. It is particularly interesting to follow how many in the call center industry have characterized the value proposition underlying this business model. More often than not, discussions about the use of home-based-agents center around the cost-savings aspects, with a particular focus on the use of home-based-agents as an alternative to sending calls offshore. Terms such as “home-shoring” are creeping into the call center vernacular, implying that companies should look at the use of home-based-agents as a way of gaining the benefits of offshore centers (low per-unit cost) without having to deal with the operational and political concerns associated with sending calls out of the country. Not only is this inaccurate; it is also, in ways, a red herring. This article addresses the real value proposition offered by the use of home-based-agents.

Agent Quality

The most significant advantage of using agents who work from their homes is ***higher-quality agents***. The reason the home-based-agent model truly can deliver on the promise of providing higher-quality agents is rather straightforward. For a given affordable wage rate, the larger the pool of candidates from which a company hires its agents, the more selective it can be in the quality of those agents. In a traditional, physical call center, there is a fairly limited radius from which a company can expect to hire agents. That radius probably is on the order of a 20-minute commute. But with a home-based-agent model that provides regional, national or even international access to agents, the candidate pool is essentially unlimited. Instead of desperately trying to keep seats filled, companies employing home-based-agents have the luxury of hiring only the very best of those applying for positions.

Having such a large reach does not automatically yield a high-quality workforce, however. It is important that the company has solid processes, specifically designed to identify those candidate characteristics that will lead to outstanding performance. Once on board, those agents expect a professional and efficient operation, with appropriate training, communications and support. The company that can meet all of those expectations will be rewarded with an agent workforce that is extremely difficult to replicate in an affordable manner at scale with a traditional call center model.

Redundancy

Next on the list of the benefits of a home-based-agent model is the unique opportunity to create a true, fully redundant service offering. Traditional call centers can implement a wide variety of sophisticated and redundant hardware and software infrastructures, providing for very high systems availability. But being able to route calls and data to an alternative location in an emergency is not very helpful if the agents trained to answer those calls all live near the primary (now non-operational) facility. Transporting trained agents to alternative locations may look good in a disaster recovery plan, but the logistics and realities of actually implementing such a plan often undermine the intended redundancy.

By Jim Ball
Alpine Access

Building comparable multilocation redundancy in a home-based-agent model, with agents dispersed over wide geographic areas, provides the ultimate redundant infrastructure. Designed properly, the loss of an entire facility at one location can go unnoticed by the end user, as calls and data are routed to alternate facilities and agents receive those calls and data without interruption.

Flexibility

One of the very attractive characteristics of the home-based-agent model is that it is possible to quickly add staff in

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the event of an unexpected increase in call volume. By contracting agents who are trained on a given call type but not normally scheduled during that time, it is possible to significantly increase staffing in a matter of minutes. Not only would those agents be far less likely to drive to a call center in such an emergency, but the time required to mobilize and effect any significant increase in staffing would likely be measured in hours rather than minutes. This can be critical, as the longer it takes to react to an unforecasted increase in call volume, the more difficult it is to dig out of the inevitable resulting queue.

The home-based-agent model provides an additional flexibility benefit in that it can more easily expand its capacity to handle *forecasted* surges in call volume. Examples include these: seasonal increases, such as holiday peaks for many retailers; first-quarter peaks for tax-related activities; and summer peaks for companies offering warm-weather products and services. Similarly, many call centers find themselves needing to staff for short bursts of activity related to month-end billing cycles or periodic product releases. As well, most call centers experience heavy Monday volumes, the activity then subsiding throughout the week.

In any of these cases, the ability to add staff without needing to worry about availability of physical seats — with the related infrastructure, such as parking, food services, break rooms, etc. — to accommodate those forecasted surges can be a significant benefit. With agents working from home, the only fixed infrastructure needed is the technical system capacity to handle peak concurrent agent load. In having more of the part-time workforce deployed during those surges, it is much easier to provide consistently high service levels.

Control

There have been concerns regarding an inability to control or manage behavior with home-based-agents. Traditional thinking and business processes call for face-to-face management of large agent populations. Management by way of wandering about is the too-often-employed default in many traditional call centers, resulting in a lack of control over many of the key operational functions. In a distributed-agent model, those traditional processes are inadequate, so new processes and systems are needed in order to manage the workforce. Implemented properly, the result is a system-driven control infrastructure that actually provides a much higher degree of "visibility" as to what every agent is doing at every moment. The systems provide the support necessary to maintain absolute control; and with thousands of agents working from home, there is either absolute control or total chaos. Because there cannot be any middle ground (and assuming chaos is an unacceptable option), the home-based-agent model is *required* to operate with a very high level of control.

Many of the traditional control components, such as real-time or recorded call monitoring, should be standard components of a home-based-agent model. Likewise, regular quality assurance sessions similar to those typically used in traditional centers are easily accommodated.

Security

Building a secure technical infrastructure is fairly similar in both traditional and home-based-agent models. The implementation of appropriate business processes also should be similar in the two models, but actually is more easily (and, therefore, likely to be) accomplished in the home-based-agent model. The people aspect, however, is more advantageous by way of the home-based-agent model.

The first thought that comes to mind for most of us when we consider data security is the external hacker or malicious program that tries to access sensitive information. In fact, if you were to ask most security experts what they think is the most vulnerable point in a given data network, they probably would tell you it is by fault of the internal people who are authorized to access those data. Whether through intentionally accessing protected data for improper purposes or through inadvertently making system accessibility available to outsiders, authorized users usually are a company's greatest security risk. The ability to be so much more selective in hiring people to whom system access will be granted allows a company using home-based-agents to significantly reduce the likelihood of a security breach.

Management by way of wandering about is the too-often-employed default in many traditional call centers, resulting in a lack of control over many of the key operational functions.

Similar to the control factor, the unique business processes needed to support a large, distributed workforce provide the opportunity to implement a much higher level of security than typically is accomplished in a traditional center. Every action of every agent at all times must be monitored and recorded by the supporting systems in order to maintain control. So it follows that there is the opportunity to leverage that control to increase security. In fact, simply making agents aware of the level of activity monitoring that takes place can be a significant deterrent to inappropriate behavior. Combined with the use of algorithms designed to identify behavioral trends that could indicate potential security breaches, the level of data protection and breach detection can be extremely high with the home-based-agent model.

Of course, the threat of attacks from outside of the network remains important. Therefore, it is necessary to build an infrastructure that has all of the appropriate technical protections in

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The higher levels of agent satisfaction resulting from the convenience of working from home also result in longer average tenures.

place. Agents working from home can connect to data systems through secure SSL connections over the Web, or through VPN (define - news - alert) tunnels, or using a variety of middleware products designed to provide secure, remote access.

Cost

A developing presumption — that the use of home-based-agents is a viable "alternative" to sending calls offshore — seems to be predicated on an expectation that the cost savings which result from not needing a physical workplace is comparable to the savings that result from the much lower labor rates in offshore markets. Given the fact that, by far, the single largest expense in any call-handling model is agent labor, and that the labor rates in the most common offshore locations are a fraction of those in domestic labor markets, it would not be possible for a home-based-agent model to compete with offshore models if the measurement was simply on the basis of the cost per agent hour (or per minute, or per call). That does not mean the home-based-agent model is without significant cost benefits, however.

In a traditional model, it generally is necessary to schedule agents for a minimum of three to four hours at a time; that way, it is worthwhile for the agent to take the time to commute to the call center. With this scheduling limitation, it can be exceedingly difficult for a traditional call center to match its workforce with the incoming call volumes in a manner that yields high agent utilization without compromising acceptable service levels. In order to maintain acceptable service levels, it generally is necessary to operate at lower-than-desired agent utilizations during certain periods of the day.

In contrast, a home-based-agent model affords a company the ability to schedule its agents in much smaller time increments; often with multiple schedules in a given day. This ability to more closely match agent labor to forecasted incoming call volume can yield a significant cost savings. Although the unit cost per hour (or per minute) may be comparable to a traditional center, the number of units required to complete the job can be much lower.

One often-overlooked cost impact is the cost per dollar of revenue generated in an average transaction. Many businesses consider the call center function to be purely a cost component. In fact, depending on the nature of the calls, it may be possible to have this function not only pay for itself, but actually become a profit center for the company. Once again, the key to that success lies in agent quality. If the call's nature is customer service, then an agent's ability to perform at a higher level can translate to higher customer retention rates, higher return purchase levels and superior word-of-mouth support, not to mention the possibility of real-time upsell and cross-sell.

If the call's nature is sales, the benefits are clear: agents who have been selected because they are friendlier, smarter and the best possible representatives for the product or service being sold will produce higher close ratios and higher average-order sizes. The higher levels of agent satisfaction resulting from the convenience of working from home also result in longer average tenures, which further translate to increased product knowledge and experience levels.

So Why Isn't Everyone Doing It?

Given the compelling value proposition, people often ask why more companies haven't made the move to home-based-agents. The first reason is it can be really difficult to do! Making the assumption that it is possible to extend traditional operational models out to the home is a big mistake. While it may work for a few agents, the chaos that would result from a more aggressive initiative — without a major shift in operational philosophy — would be disastrous.

On a more practical basis, many companies have been reluctant to move to a home-based-agent model because of the enormous amount of existing investment in traditional call center infrastructure. The brick-and-mortar aspects of that investment certainly are completely unusable in a home-based-agent model. Companies also find that much of their technology, business process and human resource investment are of little or no value in this model, as well.

To date, the combination of these factors has limited the model's large-scale adoption in existing operations. Companies looking to launch new or expanded operations, as well as a growing number of those with existing traditional centers, however, are beginning to reconsider their options as they discover the real value proposition of the home-based-agent model. **CIS**

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Virtualize Your Contact Center

Propelled by strong economic trends such as workforce globalization and corporate acquisitions, increasing numbers of companies in industries such as financial services, healthcare, retail and telecommunications have found themselves operating multiple customer contact centers of varying sizes throughout the world.

By Hollie Moran
Aspect Communications Corp.

Concurrently, the trend toward building distributed virtual contact centers has been growing, influenced by different but equally powerful business drivers:

The need to do more with less. Businesses are delaying capital expenditures and are streamlining operations in an effort to cut costs. Virtual contact centers can help reduce infrastructure costs.

The need to consolidate. Consolidating local operations into centrally administered virtual contact centers allows companies to lower expenses without sacrificing customer service.

The need to expand. Even during the economic downturn, some organizations have expanded. Virtual contact centers are a way to improve call handling capabilities and extend service across time zones, as well as across widely separated geographies.

The need to outsource. Outsourcers, for whom cost-per-transaction is a critical metric, use virtual contact center solutions to leverage labor and facility costs in less expensive venues.

The need for backup in an uncertain world. Virtual contact centers can provide a built-in backup plan if a center is offline through planning or disaster.

The need to plan for an IP future. Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) technology is a major operating expense, and enterprises are evaluating solutions that let them shift voice traffic to the less expensive IP network.

Multiple Sites? Go Virtual.

For organizations operating several contact centers, each site is frequently ill-designed to meet local or regional requirements, with best practices based on only a part of the bigger corporate picture. Agents in different locations are often trained differently, interpret corporate policies differently, and may even work using information culled from different databases. This lack of consistency can even extend to customer greetings and IVR (define - news - alert) prompts.

A far more effective approach to managing multiple geographically dispersed sites is to create a single virtual contact center. Virtual contact centers have access to bigger pools of agents, providing the ability to form larger skill groups or agent groups. This allows companies to take advantage of the pooling principle, which demonstrates that a larger group of agents is more efficient (i.e., higher occupancy rates) than smaller groups of agents. Therefore, you can achieve higher service levels with fewer agents because the right agents are being assigned to the right calls. Some of the tools associated with the virtual contact center include these:

- *Computer-telephony integration (CTI)*. Customer data can be accessed and presented to the agent's screen no matter where the caller is calling from and which agent receives the call.
- *Skills-based routing*. All contacts can be queued and routed to the best-skilled agent, regardless of channel (phone, e-mail or Web) or agent location.
- *Consolidated business rules and reporting*. This tool provides consistent business rules and reporting across all sites, enabling improved efficiencies and insight to enterprisewide, rather than single-center, trends and data.
- *VoIP technology*. This tool eliminates the need for point-to-point connections; reduces remote agent PSTN (define - news - alert)charges; and provides the flexibility to locate agents anywhere network access is available (including mobile knowledge workers).

Regardless of whether an organization chooses to network existing centers or to support agents working remotely, a distributed virtual contact center can reduce development and operating costs; can extend business hours with the same staff footprint; can use existing

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resources more efficiently; can tap into global skill pools; and can provide customers with consistent, high-quality service.

Creating A Virtual Environment

There are two primary ways to create a virtual contact center environment: network existing sites with centralized intelligence or extend contact center capabilities using remote solutions; however, a third — a combination of both — can create the most effective virtual contact center.

Network sites with centralized intelligence. Networking sites (e.g., connecting Boston and Topeka, or Boston and Bangalore) decreases costs and allows companies to send customers with specific concerns to the agents who can address them. The center's location is transparent to the caller because databases, policies and customer interfaces are uniform across the operation, a particular benefit to companies that have built a reputation for good customer service and want to maintain it.

Successfully networked sites typically share similar strategies and best practices:

- *Centralized administration and development.* Unified environments enable developers to build call flows once and then distribute them across all sites. One administrator may manage several sites, eliminating the need for administration at each site.
- *Extended operating hours.* The ability to provide service outside the normal eight-hour business window without adding staff is a competitive differentiator and a convenience for busy customers whose days do not begin at 9 a.m. or end at 5 p.m.
- *Efficient use of existing resources.* Customers gain access to agents with

specific skills, regardless of where they are located. Leveraging abilities across the enterprise saves money and helps maintain service quality.

- *Ability to tap into global skill sets.* A solution that seamlessly integrates outsourced work groups into an existing contact center allows enterprises to acquire needed skills at a considerable cost reduction.
- *Consistent response.* Centers linked by the same solution and common corporate policies present customers with a single, coherent view of the company. In a business landscape characterized by continual change, consistency is a competitive advantage.
- *Open-standards-based.* Open standards provide tight integration between applications and allow applications to work with VoIP and PSTN.

Remote solutions are also ideal, not only for reducing costs, but for expanding services, consolidating facilities and providing emergency support. Companies deploying remote solutions typically need to increase the capacity and capabilities of a primary center, but want to avoid the expense and inflexibility of building a new operation or of continuing to operate an underused one. Remote locations staffed with agents working from branch or home offices can extend customer service capabilities at lower labor costs.

Effective remote solutions make use of the following six strategies and best practices:

- *Increase branch productivity.* Integrating the branch into the enterprise can leverage employee expertise while keeping costs down. This doesn't require any special hardware at the site, but rather only a PC and a phone at each agent's desktop.
- *Centralize administration.* Building call flows, configuring multiple systems and managing agent groups from one location can reduce administrative costs and streamline operations.
- *Flexible agent deployment and use of at-home agents.* Agents need only a PC with broadband access and, sometimes, a phone; in other cases, the PC can double as the phone. Offering agents the option of working from home is a proven way to attract and retain the most skilled people without increasing costs. Or, placing agents at underused corporate locations is a great way to use space that is already being paid for through a long-term lease.
- *Consolidated sites.* Many companies find it makes sense to close centers with lower activity levels, and then link agents to remaining sites to reduce costs without jeopardizing customer service levels or losing valuable employees.
- *Lower facility and labor costs.* Organizations with prohibitively high labor and facility costs can employ agents in lower-cost areas and still manage performance centrally. Alternatively, they can outsource to countries with a well-trained — but less expensive — labor pool, and still benefit from centralized management.
- *Use of voice over IP.* Connecting VoIP-enabled agents with a PSTN-based center offers greater flexibility and cost savings, as well as protection of investments in legacy hardware and software solutions.

Planning A VoIP Network — A Brief Technical Digression

Organizations going the VoIP route find that success lies in effectively managing their IP networks. To do this, network planning and design are critical. Projects do not fail because the technology is inadequate, but because of poor planning and design. This checklist can help ensure a successful project:

- Select the best Voice-Operated Recorder (vocoder) possible for the available bandwidth because it will provide better MOS scores (minimum operational sensitivity).
- Make certain the network has sufficient bandwidth to handle the maximum number of concurrent end-to-end calls supported by the VoIP application, also ensuring there is enough bandwidth available to support additional traffic.
- Ensure that network latency and network packet loss are as low as possible.
- When using a third-party network service provider, confirm that it offers a service-level agreement with real-time performance monitoring, a bandwidth guarantee and a delay and packet-loss rate guarantee.
- Separate voice and data traffic into separate virtual LAN segments, when appropriate.
- Always prioritize voice traffic to reduce traffic delay, packet loss and echo.
- Choose phones and headsets that optimize sound quality.
- Monitor and tune frequently for optimal performance.

> **Organizations going the VoIP route find that success lies in effectively managing their IP networks. To do this, network planning and design are critical.**

The Benefits Of "Virtualizing"

"Virtualizing" contact center operations confers powerful benefits. Front and center among these for most companies will be the cost savings. In a business environment frequently ruled by severe budget constraints, superior technology alone is not a sufficient reason to make operational changes. Networked and remote solutions have proven themselves through their ability to dramatically reduce expenditures in several categories. Companies can reduce infrastructure costs by deploying agents who work in less expensive labor markets or at home, reducing facilities costs — or by consolidating their call center systems in one location. They can lower administrative costs by centrally managing all agents, both those on-site and remote, from a single location.

In addition to cost effectiveness, there are other reasons to consider virtualizing. Virtualization offers incomparable

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flexibility. It permits companies to maintain management and customer interface consistency, while linking dispersed sites or establishing outsourcing relationships with minimum difficulty. Networked centers or remote agents also make for improved disaster preparedness. If one facility is affected, agents in other locations can be brought online quickly and easily.

A virtualized contact center is also a highly productive one, usually delivering higher levels of customer service and enabling greater agent efficiency. With the ability to route calls to the most experienced or least busy agents, a virtualized call center can handle a greater volume of calls, can offer a more satisfying interactions for customers and can deliver a better rate of closure.

Moreover, offering flexible work hours and the ability to work at home can increase the pool of available labor and boost retention, as competition for skilled agents is one of the biggest challenges companies face. With agents able to work remotely across time zones, companies can expand service hours. Virtualizing also enables organizations to access a larger number of multilingual agents, as well as the ability to handle seasonal call fluctuations without the need to build new facilities.

Finally, virtual contact centers provide customers a single, consistent, coherent view of the company. They assist in providing common policies, data, business rules and reporting across the company, enhancing the customer's experience while simultaneously driving improvements in operational performance across the entire company.

When contemplating whether to deploy virtual contact centers as a strategy, all of the potential benefits should be taken into equal consideration. While organizations are quickest to respond to financial rewards, the benefits of flexibility, productivity, access to talent and the ability to deliver a greater customer experience should also be highlighted upon evaluation. Without a doubt, any organization with a contact center can benefit from virtualization. The only question is this: To what degree? **CIS**

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IP Contact Center Technology: Eliminating The Risks (Part V)

As regular readers of this column know, our focus every month is to spotlight core business issues related to multisite IP contact center deployments and the differentiated results that can be expected depending on the technology decisions made at the outset. This month, we're going to expand our "what you need to know" analysis to include licensing considerations — namely how you can get the most value for your money.

Multisite Economies Of Scale

Multisite organizations generally benefit most from IP contact center technology because they can gain huge economies of scale by centralizing technology resources for use across all locations.

Of course, most technology vendors approach centralization with an eye for preventing any loss of license revenue. Because centralized infrastructure eliminates the need for location-specific staff to provision and maintain local systems, technology vendors will typically focus on the obvious benefits of dramatically decreased staffing requirements. They'll also promote the decreased management costs that result from reducing the overall number of "one-off" integrations at different sites and the reduced complexity resulting from a single-deployment approach. Reduced hardware and data center requirements are another key benefit you will see highlighted in vendor white papers. You can also expect to hear about telecom efficiencies and reduced telecom infrastructure costs (which are achieved by having multiple locations share a common pool of phone lines in one or more data centers — with IP-based routing between locations). Of course, technology vendors will also spotlight centralization benefits related to operational efficiency, as a common multisite infrastructure empowers more efficient skills-based routing (enabling routing to the "best-qualified" available agent, without reference to physical location).

The one issue that technology vendors typically avoid talking about is economies of scale in licensing costs. This month, we'll focus on what you need to know to gain and maximize economies of scale in software licensing.

Dynamic Cross-Media Licensing

An important licensing consideration is whether your vendor of multisite infrastructure provides "cross-media" licensing; wherein a license works for any communications medium and, as needed, can be reallocated to different communications media types dynamically (in real time). A cross-media license should encompass every form of customer communication, including phone calls, chat sessions, Web collaboration, voice-over-Web and Web callback, as well as e-mail, fax and voice mail management. It should also encompass all of the monitoring and recording technologies required to deliver world-class customer service.

A cross-media licensing approach is better because it eliminates the need for separate licensing for each medium of communication, in favor of a "dynamic license" that can be dynamically applied to any form of communication. For example, with dynamic cross-media licensing, a thousand licenses can service 1,000 phone calls for agents one moment, or 500 phone calls and 500 chat sessions for agents in the next — using a shared pool of licenses that extends across all media. A pool of universal licenses is also an easier and more cost-effective way to manage than by estimating needs and purchasing separate licenses for each communication media. Cross-media licensing is more efficient because it reduces overall licensing requirements and eliminates the risk of possible shortages in some mediums, while other licenses sit idle as the contact center struggles with spikes in media-specific traffic.

Per-Seat And Per-Login Licensing Inefficiencies

Most vendors sell technology on a per-seat or per-login basis. There are no economies of scale in per-seat licensing and only limited economies of scale in technology licensed on a per-login basis. Because an agent shift is typically eight hours long, the maximum economies of scale that one can expect from per-login licensing is 3x — and even that figure is deceptive because it's only meaningful to companies that offer 24-hour service. Here's why:

Let's use a hypothetical U.S.-based operation as an example. Despite having multiple time zones within the U.S., if every center in a multisite enterprise operates between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. local time in each U.S.-based time zone, then at some point in the day every center would be running at 100 percent of logins. This means that there would be no reduction in required login-based licenses. As most U.S.-based companies using offshore agents do so to serve the U.S. market, in most cases there would be no economies of scale by going offshore either.

Licensing Designed For Multisite IP Contact Center Deployments

Carriers and large-scale service providers were among the first to recognize the lack of efficiency in traditional per-seat

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and per-login-based licensing models. Before launching hosted services initiatives at scale, these service providers recognized the need to rethink how they licensed software; this in order to achieve economies of scale that could be translated into lower pricing for business customers and competitive advantage over new entrants. The goal was to drive down the cost of hosted services to levels far below the cost of deploying traditional, dedicated premise-based systems. These service providers demanded "capacity-based" licensing from the technology vendors who would supply the infrastructure for their emerging hosted services offerings.

The capacity-based approach allows service providers to leverage economies of scale because it enables them to support more than one logged-in agent per license; with "licenses in the cloud" to enable license sharing across all locations. The philosophical core of this model is that idle agents, regardless of the fact that they are logged in and looking at their screens, should not tie up a contact center technology license unless they are actively communicating with a customer. The corollary to this, of course, is that the solution should provide unlimited logins. Because different businesses have different peak busy hours, economies of scale will result from sharing a common pool of licenses in a "shared license" capacity-based licensing model across different businesses and/or different time zones.

A good analogy is the comparison with dial-tone. Dial-tone is a shared resource that appears to be dedicated to our homes because dial-tone is always there when we need it. Unless there's an earthquake or some other disaster that causes everyone to pick up their phones at the same time, most of us live happily under the illusion that we've got dedicated dial-tone — while the phone company shares dial-tone resources across its subscriber base to reduce per-user costs to levels far below what it would cost to maintain dedicated dial-tone resources for each phone line. That is the capacity-based licensing model in a nutshell.

Over time, the capacity-based licensing model has also become available to corporate customers. When capacity-based licensing is applied to corporate use of contact center technologies, economies of scale are driven by the diversity of the business units, sites and vertical markets that are being served, as well as by the differences in their peak busy hours. Because the peak busy hour is constantly moving across time zones, license utilization is maximized in larger companies whose operations are distributed across many different time zones. The greater the diversity of time zones, sites and business units, the greater the number of seats-per-license that can be supported. That's called the "agent-to-license utilization ratio" — and a better ratio equals lower costs.

Competitive Advantage

A service provider having a four-to-one agent-to-license utilization ratio means that the service provider can support four agents with a single license. Assuming there is price parity per license between seat-based and capacity-based licensing models, in this example the service provider's cost per seat would be one-fourth of the cost of a dedicated per-seat license. The result: even at 100 percent margin, the service provider can deliver equivalent infrastructure as a service for half of what it would cost to buy and operate a dedicated premise-based solution in a traditional licensing model (without up-front capital expenses).

The same math holds true for a "corporate service provider" that buys its own infrastructure and delivers services to its own internal constituents from its own data center(s). The greater the diversity of business units and time zones, the better the agent-to-license utilization ratio is likely to be. The result of the capacity-based licensing model is that bigger, multisite organizations with more diversity will operate at lower cost than their smaller competitors. Those companies will also operate their contact centers at a much lower cost than equivalent or larger-sized companies whose contact centers are saddled with "traditional" per-seat or per-login technology licensing.

As we've discussed in previous columns, autonomy loss at the local level can also be eliminated as an issue despite the fact that all technologies are centralized, as true "multitenant" solutions will provide greater local control over "virtual" infrastructure than what was possible with traditional legacy solutions installed locally at each location.

Effectively Leveraging Time Zone Efficiencies

To effectively maximize your agent-to-license utilization ratios, look for solutions that also include time zone sensitivity. This will enable all of your reports and real-time data to be presented in the context of each user's local time zone, empowering geographically distributed agents, supervisors and administrators to most effectively leverage your centralized IP contact center infrastructure. Your solution should also have configurable language support and localization capabilities to allow users to work in their own native language, with data presented in their own local context, thereby better empowering multinational license utilization and greater agent-to-license utilization ratios.

Conclusion

Multisite IP contact center deployments should leverage centralized infrastructure solutions to gain economies of scale and dramatically reduce their operating costs across locations. The alternative is duplication, inefficiency, higher costs and competitive disadvantage. The approach under which that centralized infrastructure is licensed will be a key determinant of the degree to which multisite efficiencies will be achieved.

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The Benefits Of Distributing The Call Center

In the olden days, they called them "boiler rooms." Call center employees were hearty (and underpaid) souls who sat in large, unpleasant rooms, spending eight hours a day manually dialing out and reading scripts off index cards. Had Dante lived to see it, he might have reserved a special place in his Inferno for these primitive call centers.

Flash forward a few decades, and thanks to the benefits of auto-dialers, PCs, computer-telephony integration and a variety of call center software innovations (not to mention the intervention of OSHA, in all likelihood), call center jobs are a thousand times more pleasant than during "the olden days." Many of today's contact centers have break rooms, rest rooms, cafeterias, modular and ergonomically correct furniture, coffee bars, day care centers, massage therapists, exercise facilities and game rooms, all aimed at keeping employees healthy, stress-free and content.

One thing hasn't changed from the days of yore, however: hundreds (even thousands) of employees still show up at the same location each day, fight for parking spaces, ride elevators and climb stairs together, fight to be heard over the voices of co-workers and compete for the last cheese Danish in the cafeteria. The call center is still — well — a center.

When distributed call centers began debuting with some of the more daring companies, everyone assumed that this model was being created out of necessity: a company couldn't find enough agents in one town or state, so they had to open another, smaller center in a neighboring area in order to fill seats. Years later, enter broadband Internet, IP telephony, advanced contact center software, skills-based routing, videoconferencing, increased globalization, offshore outsourcing and multilingual markets.

Follow-the-sun service (locating call centers in distributed time zones, so no one has to work a "graveyard" shift in order to provide 24-hour customer service) was the first clue that, perhaps not only was the distributed call center model sometimes necessary, it was a smart business choice, as well. One large organization, if it provides around-the-clock service, is always paying overtime to someone, whether second- or third-shift workers, or agents who are forced to pull overtime due to their unique technical or language skills.

Nowadays, there are few, if any, drawbacks to opting for smaller, distributed centers. Some of these smaller "centers" might even be individual agents working from home (and thus saving overhead costs). Experts can be brought in to service remotely, at any time, and offshore or nearshore locations may be used to balance domestic costs; and, as detailed by Eli Borodow and Kevin Hayden in the accompanying article, workers operating in different time zones can share software licenses during one another's "off" times. Nowadays, there are positive implications with this model when it comes to disaster recovery, as well.

Old wives' aphorisms tell us that it's best not to put all of one's eggs in one basket. The modern customer-facing enterprise is beginning to draw the same conclusion.

By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions magazine

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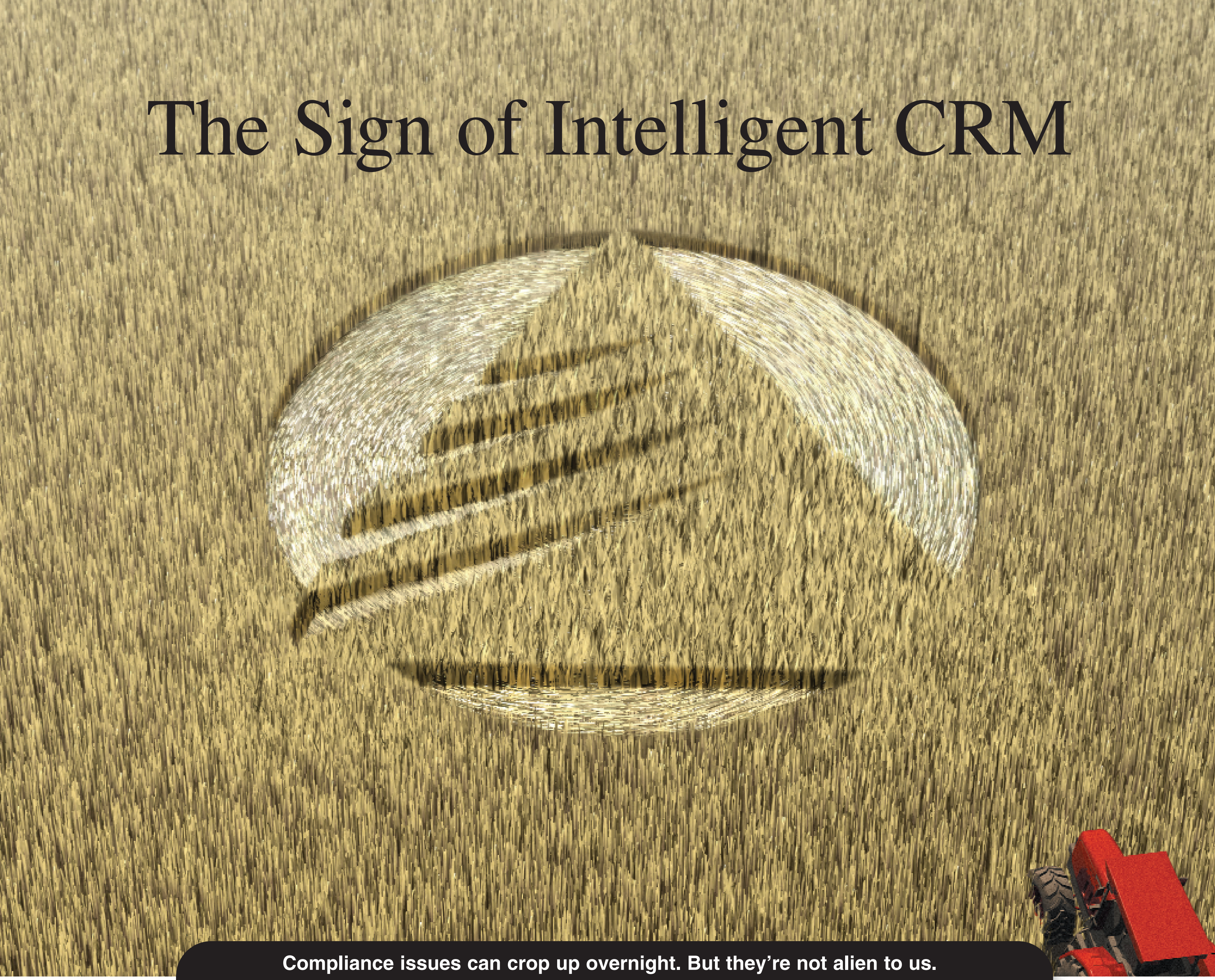
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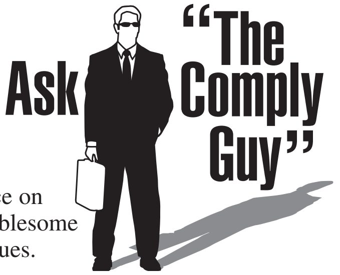

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The Next Step In The Evolution Of Customer Care:

The Customer Interaction Network

Businesses have for years understood that providing their customers with a superior customer contact experience means connecting customers to the right person with the right information as quickly as possible. Comprehensive customer information must be available to customer service agents both instantly and from any location around the globe. As a result, phone, Web and other communications channels can now be fully integrated with business and customer relationship management (CRM) applications, creating a true "customer interaction network" that goes far beyond the traditional call center.

Although many businesses have embraced this concept and have been moving steadily toward a more intelligent, multichannel customer interaction model, consumers who call contact centers will likely tell you that most companies still have a long way to go. According to a recent study by Purdue University's Center for Customer-Driven Quality, 92 percent of U.S. consumers base their opinion of a company on their experience with its contact center, and 63 percent will stop using a product or service if they have a negative experience.

Clearly, businesses understand the importance of improving the contact center, and the technology to accomplish this is available. As companies embrace Internet Protocol (IP) as the foundation of their business networks, they've already laid the groundwork for supporting integrated communication channels and greater customer visibility. So what is behind the delay in implementing these improvements?

To make the vision of the intelligent, fully integrated customer interaction network a reality, businesses need to rethink the way their contact center technologies support and define their business capabilities.

Ideally, technology should be an enabler for an organization's larger business goals, but much of the problem lies within contact centers themselves, and the time-division multiplexing (TDM) voice systems that support them. Unfortunately, the limitations of TDM-based contact centers dictate the way organizations handle customer contacts and manage customer service resources.

Overcoming The Barriers To Better Customer Service

The technology at the core of traditional contact centers, including TDM-based automatic call distributors (ACDs), interactive voice response (IVR) (define - news - alert) systems and private branch exchange (PBX) (define - news - alert) phone systems, can severely limit the way companies manage customer interactions. And this shouldn't be a surprise: the technology was designed to serve the large, self-contained call centers of the past. These solutions are adequate for companies that house all of their customer service resources at one location, where there is little need to distribute functionality over large geographic regions or to incorporate enterprisewide call-routing intelligence. But few companies operate that way today.

By Don Proctor
Cisco Systems

Thanks to the Internet and modern networking technologies, today's enterprises typically have multiple contact centers spread out across a country or across the world. They use several different channels to serve their customers, including telephone, Web sites, e-mail, Web-based chat and even video. But despite these advances, decades-old call center technology makes many contact centers inflexible, inefficient and difficult to integrate into a modern, distributed business operation.

Some of the limitations of traditional call center technology include the following.

Call routing in TDM-based contact centers is inherently inefficient. Traditional contact centers use a circuit-

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switched transport model to handle incoming calls, with each contact center housing its own ACD and IVR system. Effectively sharing resources or applying call-routing intelligence across the enterprise is impossible. Any incoming call must be queued to one contact center location before any information can be gathered from the customer, before any routing rules can be applied, or before any action can be taken by CRM applications.

Once a call is queued and the information is gathered, the customer may still need to be transferred to another location to get to the right resource. Rerouting a call over the public switched telephone network (PSTN) means additional take-back-and-transfer (T&T) toll costs and longer customer wait times. Even more frustrating for customers, the lack of communication between contact centers means having to wade through multiple IVR systems and having to provide the same information several times.

TDM-based technologies isolate contact centers and customer service staff. When a company has what amounts to separate, independently operating contact centers, there can be no enterprisewide visibility or real-time resource sharing. As a result, many companies simply separate business processes by location, with each contact center specializing in a specific product or service line. These self-contained, inward-looking contact centers cannot effectively or dynamically distribute resources to respond to changing customer demands. If a product is recalled, for example, customers may inundate one contact center and face 20-minute hold times, while representatives at another contact center are idle.

Isolated contact centers carry high administrative costs. To manage the separate ACD, IVR and telephony systems at each location, enterprises must staff each contact center with skilled (and costly) IT employees. Further, any changes or upgrades to ACD/IVR software must be duplicated at each location.

Traditional contact center technologies impede true multichannel integration. During the past several years, many companies invested in solutions to provide service over Web, e-mail and other channels, as well as in CRM systems, to support more personalized, profitable customer interactions. But unlike Internet and CRM solutions that use the IP standard, TDM-based voice systems rely on proprietary programming languages and technologies. Even when multichannel services are available, they are difficult to integrate with voice systems into a unified customer service approach.

Customer sessions beginning in one channel generally must end in that channel, and service representatives have little ability to offer multiple types of assistance within a single session. Many companies even staff separate contact center locations to manage each communication channel. In this scenario, if a customer makes an initial contact with a service center via chat but later decides he or she would like to speak with the representative by phone, the customer will likely end up speaking with a completely different contact center, having to explain his or her problem all over again.

What's the alternative? Is there a way to shape customer contact technologies around business objectives, to fully integrate multiple communication channels, and to streamline call-routing processes?

The answer is yes. By moving from TDM-based technologies to a system built entirely on IP, companies can shift from a simple contact center model to an intelligent, enterprisewide customer interaction network, allowing to take a more responsive, cost-effective approach to customer contacts.

Unleashing The Flexibility Of IP

A modern customer interaction network is built on a distributed, IP-based architecture, and the network supports a continuously evolving suite of multichannel services that streamline customer exchanges and enhance the customer experience. Voice, e-mail, Web and other channels are unified under a single customer service umbrella and are fully integrated with enterprise applications, databases, directories and CRM systems. This comprehensive approach extends visibility and capabilities across an entire organization, providing a more collaborative, coordinated strategy for delivering customer care.

When a company has what amounts to separate, independently operating contact centers, there can be no enterprisewide visibility or real-time resource sharing.

A core component of the modern customer interaction network is the convergence of voice and data services, referred to as IP telephony or voice over IP (VoIP). When telephony services can be distributed across an enterprise in the same manner as any other network service, businesses gain more flexibility, efficiency and control over customer interactions.

Once disparate voice and data services are converged over a single IP network, organizations can use a single, universal ACD system and a universal queue for all incoming customer calls. Enterprisewide routing intelligence and CRM policies can be applied at the network edge, and calls can be immediately directed to the right location, eliminating most T&T costs and reducing customer wait times.

Having a single, universal ACD system also gives companies true global visibility into customer contact operations. Instead of trying to assimilate statistics from each ACD system at each contact center, a unified customer interaction network provides comprehensive, real-time reporting and analysis for the entire enterprise, allowing businesses to act on the information they receive. For example, consider a hypothetical product-recall scenario: Even if a single contact center is still handling the recall, a customer interaction network with IP intelligence can assess call volume across the enterprise, recognize that one contact center is being inundated, and dynamically reroute all non-recall-related calls to less busy locations.

That type of flexibility also offers built-in protection against network outages or natural disasters. Emergency call-routing rules can be automatically or manually activated from any location in the enterprise, and callers can be redirected to alternate locations almost instantly, without even realizing there is a problem.

Of course, for many enterprises, the greatest draw of a distributed IP customer interaction network is the potential for substantial savings. With a single, unified ACD system, enterprises can manage the entire customer contact environment from a single location, with little or no on-site IT staff at individual contact centers. Unlike a TDM-based model, updates to ACD and IVR systems need only be made once, and every contact center across the enterprise immediately reflects the changes. And for many enterprises, the toll savings from moving site-to-site calls to the data network alone pays for the entire solution within the first few years after deployment.

Making The Most Of Employee Resources

A modern customer interaction network also provides greater flexibility to attract, retain and connect customer service employees. In a traditional contact center, service representatives must be physically located close to the contact center's ACD system. In a distributed IP environment, employees can field calls from anywhere as long as they are connected to the company's network.

Some enterprises use this flexibility to support home-based employees. A full- or part-time home-based workforce can substantially reduce overall contact center costs, especially in areas with high real-estate costs. In an industry within which the cost of recruiting and training skilled staff typically makes up more than two-thirds of total contact center costs, the ability to allow employees to work at home also presents a great incentive for attracting and retaining the best staff.

Many enterprises are going a step further, using distributed IP contact centers to bring branch office employees into the customer contact environment. For example, an employee at a bank branch can take customer calls during hours when foot traffic is slow, or serve as an expert resource for calls that require escalation. Branch office workers can also be temporarily brought into the contact center environment to help with a new product launch or any other event that creates a spike in call volume.

The integration of branch office and contact center employees also creates opportunities for more personalized, localized service. For example, if a customer calls an insurance company's national call center to ask about purchasing a policy, the remote contact center agent has limited options for following up on the call. But if that customer's call was automatically routed to an employee at a nearby local branch, the agent can offer to personally stop by the customer's home or office to continue the conversation.

Delivering A Better Customer Experience

In addition to the business advantages, customer contact environments that harness IP intelligence can have a profound impact on the way customers interact with the company. More streamlined, enterprisewide call routing means that customers get the information they need quicker and more easily. An IP customer interaction network also accommodates full integration among all customer communication channels, because all voice, Web and other services are delivered over IP. Contact center employees can use phone, e-mail, text chat and other services within a single customer session, serving customers in the way (or ways) most convenient to them.

A unified customer interaction network also unlocks the full potential of enterprise CRM systems by providing global visibility and full integration across all channels and business applications. Enterprises can better identify and track customers entering the environment — no matter which channel they may be using — and use all of the tools at their disposal to cross-sell and upsell, enhance customer loyalty and ensure a consistent customer experience.

Moving Toward The IP Customer Interaction Network

Many enterprises have already made the leap to distributed, fully integrated IP customer contact systems, already reaping the benefits. But companies considering this approach should recognize that a successful customer interaction network requires more than simply deploying a new technology. Enterprises need to re-examine the way in which customer communications systems fit within the framework of their business; they must ask the important questions about how those systems have reshaped business objectives.

Some technologies on the market offer incremental steps toward a distributed contact center model by "IP-enabling" traditional TDM systems and creating hybrid solutions. Certainly, businesses with major investments in legacy ACDs and PBXs have good reason to consider these solutions. But while a hybrid approach may provide some of the benefits of IP intelligence, organizations relying on TDM technologies will in the long run still be locked into an inherently rigid, inefficient model for communicating with their customers. To take full advantage of the intelligence, efficiency, cost savings and enhanced customer care offered by a unified customer interaction network, organizations should consider a more fundamental shift toward embracing IP. **CIS**

Don Proctor is the vice president and general manager of the Voice Technology Group at Cisco Systems (quote - news-alert) . He is responsible for the business units that develop Cisco's enterprise and service provider voice products, including IP-PBX systems, IP phones, voice mail and unified messaging products, rich media conferencing and collaboration platforms, call center solutions, carrier soft switches and broadband application infrastructure for service providers.

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The Elusive Achievement Of IP Contact Center ROI:

Ten Reasons Why Contact Centers Migrating To IP Telephony Don't Hit Their ROI Projections — And What You Can Do About It

One of the leading messages for IP telephony in contact center markets is that IP reduces costs and "increases your return on investment," or "delivers ROI in 12 to 18 months," or "produces a higher ROI than traditional communications." But while IP is backing up its savings claim with causes and effects such as toll bypass to reduce long-distance charges and simplified moves, adds and changes that lower IT and labor costs, the ROI equation remains open to interpretation.

Not surprisingly, the majority of contact centers that have adopted VoIP these past few years have failed to reach their projected ROI numbers and time frames. Why? The reasons vary, as no two IP migration projects are alike. Yet what is consistent from one project to the next are the misappropriation, or total lack of, true ROI dynamics in a contact center's ROI model.

Here are 10 of the most common reasons why contact centers and other businesses don't meet ROI objectives as planned, why vendors frequently come up short of advertised ROI timeframes, and what you can do to fix it.

1. No strategy, no ROI. Just as timing is everything in business, strategies are everything for IP migrations and maximization of return on investment — especially for multisite contact centers that lack a clearly defined plan to consolidate agents and skills across sites. By formulating and refining a plan to optimize VoIP (define - news - alert), virtually any distributed contact center organization can more effectively balance call loads, reduce wait times and match each customer with the appropriate agent the first time. That, in turn, means more customers, higher customer retention rates, increased revenues and, ultimately, a better overall ROI.

2. Innovation counts. It's no secret how critical competitive advantages are to a contact center's prosperity and survival. With innovation as a driving force, new IP telephony software suites for contact centers pre-integrate features such as speech-enabled IVR (define - news - alert) to off-load agent time and knowledge management to off-load FAQs and routine customer requests. For one reason or another, though, most contact centers fail to leverage IP to inject innovation into the services on which their customers insist. Instead, they mimic the traditional systems they're accustomed to, offer no real value-adds to consumers (or clients, in the case of a teleservices provider), and miss out on opportunities to further elevate ROI.

3. Hardware or software? All major PBX (define - news - alert) and telecommunications vendors offer VoIP solutions, and they have for a few years now. Three things to be aware of, however, should your contact center decide to go the proprietary IP migration route: 1) The IP products from these vendors are essentially hardware add-ons and forklift upgrades that drain ROI; 2) Most hardware-centric vendors are still trying to adopt the SIP open-communications standard that supports VoIP; and 3) Proprietary vendors continue to lock your contact center into their own often-overpriced IP system components, such as gateways, voice cards and end user devices.

Moreover, consider that new IP technologies have become increasingly software-based, as calls are directed to application servers on the data network, similar to e-mail, Web chats and other media. The better ROI bet, then, is to look closely at a bundled application suite for IP, particularly one that provides a migration path via open standards, including SIP.

4. Hardware or software? (Part II). A few more ROI-regarding reasons to consider a software-based migration to VoIP: server-driven IP solutions open the door to new ROI-enhancing technologies such as the Intel NetStructure Host Media Processing (HMP) software, which provides the resources for voice, conference and fax capabilities as well as RTP audio streaming for IP-based speech recognition. IT staff can additionally appreciate HMP because it allows for replacing complex, unreliable voice hardware as well as reduction of maintenance and costs.

Additionally, as opposed to proprietary voice boards for handling station or trunk/line interfaces, calls in an IP environment are directed to the application server for ACD, PBX, IVR and other voice functions via SIP. Auto-attendant processes are similarly executed by pre-integrated applications. And whether for one location or for several, server-based IP systems are easily administered over a LAN or WAN — usually with a single central interface — and even allow you to purchase, when needed, only the applications and functionali-

ty your contact center needs.

5. The best-case scenario illusion. So you've decided on an IP solution and formulated your IP migration or implementation plan. The first thing to expect is that not everything will go as expected. Costs for additional needed labor exceed budget, the new IP system isn't fully utilized early on, etc. Contact centers, therefore, should figure their preliminary ROI model, then immediately trim 20 percent to 25 percent for unplanned expenditures that typically come with an IP migration.

6. Forgotten ROI contributors. On-the-go consumers are increasingly taking advantage of the automation that IP contact center suites offer, such as speech-driven IVR, FAQ auto-response and Web self-service. As these and other convenient services attract customers, the revenues they bring to business add to the return on technology investment. Oddly, though, many contact centers overlook this aspect and miscalculate ROI expectations, even when the competitive advantages which IP provides are an ROI upside.

7. Overemphasizing soft-dollar returns. Many contact centers base their ROI forecasts on "soft-dollar" results, such as better agent productivity, operations efficiency and so on. Though results like these can certainly be measured and calculated toward a return on investment, ROI projections should first focus on hard-dollar cost savings, such as how much your contact center stands to save over a 12-month period by using SIP long-distance dialing. Additional hard-dollar calculations can include, among others, how much you'll save in proprietary vendor maintenance contracts after replacing a PBX, as well as how much new IP phones or soft phones will reduce equipment costs.

8. Disregarding secondary costs. Along with soft-dollar ROI projections, contact centers often fail to account for "secondary" costs associated with a new IP system deployment. That is, they don't gauge costs to (re)train users, costs to train internal support personnel, or other similar level-two expenditures beyond initial system purchase and direct labor costs. Of course, contact center and IT managers know best what their agents' training needs will be and how much their support staff knows or doesn't know about VoIP, but a qualified IP consultant can objectively help zero in on these and other secondary costs for more accurate ROI estimates.

9. Generic ROI models don't completely apply. IP vendors aren't necessarily untruthful, but certain parts of the ROI calculators they use are generic and may not apply to your IP migration project's expected return on investment — not completely, at least. So keep a critical eye on the ROI calculator any vendor uses, eliminate those items that don't apply to your IP initiatives, and customize the final ROI study based on your contact center's specific expectations.

10. Vendor shortcuts in the ROI calculation process. Again, many vendors make an honest effort to ensure you're satisfied with their IP products and services. But when it comes to their ROI estimation process, these vendors often take a quick look, make a couple of calculations and call everything good. Businesses investing in these technologies should demand that vendors take the time — and interest — to fully and correctly calculate any ROI for their migration to IP telephony. In doing so, companies can eliminate problems on the back-end if and when original ROI expectations are not met.

The Bottom Line On ROI

Review any business' communications investment objectives and you'll find a higher ROI is nearly always at the top of its list. Interactive Intelligence has installed its Customer Interaction Center (CIC) software in thousands of contact centers and enterprises worldwide — with hundreds of implementations of the CIC IP contact center suite based on VoIP and SIP — and in virtually every project our customers have emphasized the importance of their return on investment.

What is the business moral here? Let us help with your contact center's migration to VoIP. Because along with delivering innovative yet practical IP solutions, it's safe to say we've learned quite a bit about optimizing "true" ROI. Our customers have made sure of it.

Peggy Gritt is senior director, Product Marketing, for Interactive Intelligence Inc., a global developer of software for contact centers and the enterprise since 1994. Interactive Intelligence integrated out-of-the-box IP functionality into its lineup of business communications software solutions in 2002, and today remains a leader in the VoIP and SIP movement. Contact Interactive Intelligence at 317-872-3000 by voice and fax, or visit http://www.inin.com for more on the company's complete suite of IP contact center solutions.

Returning To The Old IT Adage Of "Garbage In, Garbage Out"

As anyone who has worked in the tech industry for even only a few years knows, the chasm between technology and business management has always been great. I once worked with a manager (many, many years ago) who couldn't understand why his administrative staff couldn't simply "press a button" and come up with exactly the information he needed from the computer. In his case, desktop PCs were new and foreign, and he had no understanding of how they worked. If the chasm in those days was wide, the gap between technology goals and abilities and business administration needs nowadays stretches from the board room to Jupiter. With the introduction of ever more advanced technologies to assist companies in doing business, the potential for misunderstanding becomes greater.

The fault is usually not with the technology (and I say that with complete confidence, though I may get some e-mail from tweaked readers). We watched CRM solutions undergo the same confusion and, ultimately, take the blame for their lack of success. Company personnel at all levels were uninformed as to what CRM could and couldn't do. Many people who splashed out for advanced call center technologies didn't even know what yardstick to use in measuring the success or failure of the program. It's a little hard to know if you finished the race ahead when you don't know where the finish line was located in the first place.

Part of the fault may lie with the media. Mainstream news organizations, desperate to find ways to report on hot technologies while still delivering the news in a sensational, attention-grabbing way, throw around the superlative adjectives promising the benefits of new technologies like tabloids salaciously distributing photos of celebrities leaving rehab clinics. Company directors imagine they can leave the technical and process-related details fully in the hands of their IT departments and don't educate themselves as to what it is they bought into, what it does, what needs it serves, what it can and cannot do, and what processes need to change to accommodate the new technology.

When results such as ROI and post-implementation analytics drift in, the top-level management of a company often finds itself caught; if the results aren't what management promised the board, someone needs blaming. Often it's the IT department or the technology vendor itself. In retrospect, companies will find that the technology they purchased, while of high quality, did not suit the company's needs in the first place. Technology can't be bought like designer clothing or cars: "That's an expensive brand, so it must be good" is a dangerous way to spend money on company technological capital.

More than anything else, managing expectations and understanding company goals must be a step in the tech-buying process that is revisited over and over again throughout the buying and implementation process.

Otherwise, you may find after you buy the Ferrari that what you really needed was a vehicle for offroading.

By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

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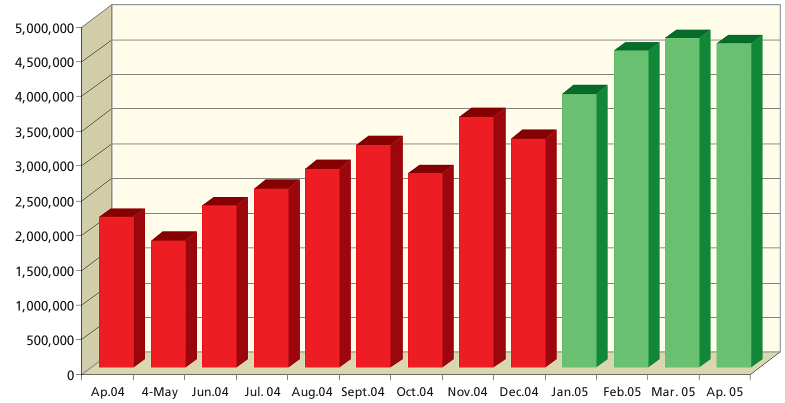

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ScanSoft, Nuance To Merge

ScanSoft, Inc. (news - alert) and **Nuance Communications, Inc.** (news - alert) recently announced that the two companies have signed a definitive agreement whereby ScanSoft will acquire all of the outstanding common stock of Nuance, merging the two organizations into a single company. Under the terms of the agreement, ScanSoft will issue approximately 28 million shares of its common stock to Nuance shareholders, who will receive 0.77 shares of ScanSoft common stock for each share of Nuance common stock they own. Additionally, each Nuance shareholder will receive $2.20 of cash per share of Nuance common stock owned. The transaction is valued at approximately $221 million based on the closing price of ScanSoft common stock of $4.46 per share on May 6, 2005, or $122 million net of Nuance's cash and equivalents of $98.7 million on March 31, 2005, which includes $11.1 million of restricted cash. Upon closing, ScanSoft expects to have approximately $80 million in cash and marketable securities. The transaction is expected to generate cost synergies between $25 million and $30 million per year through headcount reductions, office site consolidations and elimination of duplicate operating expenses. In ScanSoft's fiscal year 2006, the company has stated that it expects combined revenue to exceed $315 million.

According to the companies, ScanSoft and Nuance combined automate more than 20 million contact center and directory assistance calls per day; bringing speech functionality to millions of people through mobile phones, automobiles, consumer electronics and games; and providing dictation solutions for more than 3,000 hospitals and more than one million consumers worldwide. The combination of ScanSoft and Nuance is expected to bring together one of the industry's most comprehensive portfolios of speech applications, technologies and expertise.

ScanSoft and Nuance will each bring a set of speech applications and technologies to the combined company. These assets will theoretically allow the combined company to satisfy a wider set of customers' speech needs from a single source. As speech technologies continue to converge, the combined company will be able to leverage a set of resources that spans the full breadth of speech capabilities — including network speech, embedded speech and dictation. The combined organization will bring together an array of resources — from 300 speech scientists and engineers to a patent portfolio comprising more than 250 patent families. With these assets, the combined company is positioned to handle complex implementations and potentially solve more difficult problems with speech technology. Both ScanSoft and Nuance have been active proponents of speech industry standards. Both companies are strong participants in the development of VoiceXML, including providing multiple editors, and both companies were founding drafters of the MRCP specification.

Paul Ricci will be the chairman and CEO of the merged company. As part of the transaction, two of Nuance's board members, including Chuck Berger, president and CEO of Nuance, will join the ScanSoft board of directors. The transaction has been approved unanimously by both boards of directors and is subject to the approval of ScanSoft and Nuance shareholders and normal closing conditions that include regulatory approvals. ScanSoft expects the transaction to close in September 2005.
http://www.nuance.com and **http://www.scansoft.com**

> "Go three days without reading and your speech will become tasteless."
>
> — *Chinese proverb*

Empirix Launches New OneSight Telephony Monitors For Concerto, Intervoice And Nuance Environments

Empirix Inc., (news - alert) which helps organizations strengthen customer loyalty through assured Web and voice application performance, has announced new telephony monitors for its OneSight for Contact Centers proactive application management solution. The pre-built monitors for **Concerto**, **Intervoice** and **Nuance** environments were designed to help organizations more quickly and easily start monitoring their automated systems so they can identify and correct emerging problems before callers or agents are affected.

OneSight for Contact Centers allows customer service executives and contact center/IT operations staff to proactively pinpoint and address customer-related issues hidden within their technology infrastructures — issues that are often obscured in various "black boxes." OneSight and its telephony monitors allow organizations to correlate the end-to-end caller experience with the health of each application component and its critical links to other telephony and data resources. The integrated management solution helps customers more quickly identify and isolate probable causes of common technology issues, including IVR outages; misrouted or dropped calls; slow screen pops; and poor speech recognition rates.

Empirix recently introduced monitors for **Cisco** (quote - news - alert) ICM and **Nortel** (quote - news - alert) MPS 1000 environments. With this announcement, it also offers monitors for the Concerto EnsemblePro complete contact center solution and FirstPoint Enterprise integrated ACD and CTI platform (which Concerto Software recently acquired from Rockwell Automation); Intervoice Omvia Voice Framework; and Nuance Voice Platform.

Nuance is one of several vendors that worked closely with Empirix to develop monitoring profiles. According to Leo Haasbroek, vice president of professional services for Nuance, proactive monitoring is a best practice for ensuring end-to-end performance of contact center technology environments. "Complex integrations can make finding and correcting problems challenging," said Haasbroek. "End-to-end monitoring with solutions like Empirix OneSight can provide detail not only on individual components, but also at the integration points where many problems tend to originate."
http://www.empirix.com

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LumenVox's Speech Tuner Supports Nuance 8.5

LumenVox, (news - alert) a provider of speech recognition technology, has announced the availability of Nuance 8.5 support with its Speech Tuner. The Tuner was updated to allow companies working with Nuance-based speech applications to perform various tuning and testing in-house. LumenVox's Speech Tuner is a maintenance tool that allows end users, value-added resellers and platform providers to perform tuning and transcription as well as parameter, grammar and version-upgrade testing of any speech-driven application created on the Nuance 8.5 and LumenVox platforms. The Tuner allows companies to tune and test each interaction on the fly, providing interactive tuning and testing sessions. Using their own call logs, companies can get a detailed view of how the ASR is responding to callers. They can make changes to grammars and engine parameters, and immediately retest against historical data to determine if any change would help, hurt or make no difference to the application's performance in the future.

With this GUI-based tool, companies developing speech applications on various ASR platforms can bring speech application tuning in-house and avoid professional service fees. Keith Herold, lead speech recognition developer at LumenVox, states, "The Speech Tuner's support for Nuance is in high demand in the industry. The Speech Tuner is a crucial piece in the industry's effort to promote speech applications and improve the caller's experience, regardless of which ASR vendor is being deployed. Our next steps will be towards integrating other speech engines like **ScanSoft**, **IBM**, **Loquendo**, etc."

http://www.lumenvox.com

Definition Du Jour

Sociolinguistics
A scientific study of the connection between language and society and culture. Understanding sociolinguistics allows the creators of speech applications to understand what information or mood certain vocabularies, accents, pronunciations and cadences communicate to the listener or reveal about the speaker.

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Design Issues In Multilingual Applications

People have always perceived and organized the world in terms that are familiar to them. Why else would the constellation that was called "The Great Bear" in ancient Greece and Rome now be called "The Big Dipper" in North America, "The Casserole" in France or "The Plough" in England? Those "mental models" were strongly influenced by culture, environment and experience. Similarly, anyone who calls into an IVR (interactive voice response) system and experiences the "hear and feel" of the interface will necessarily form a mental model of the interaction. Drawing on past experiences and cultural norms, the caller's expectations about how to interact with the system will be set.

Look Right!

While crossing the streets of London, tourists can be grateful for the signs painted on the roads' crosswalks advising them to "Look Right" for oncoming traffic. If you're a pedestrian from a country where cars navigate the right side of road, you're conditioned to expect that when stepping off a curb, the most immediate danger will come from your left. It's not intuitive to first look right when entering a crosswalk. The local government knows this and has judiciously stenciled arrows and words of warning onto their sidewalks, even though the majority of local pedestrians, being natives, don't need them. The city has provided the extra instructions that we foreigners need to compensate for something that's not intuitive to us, so we can navigate their streets without ending up on the hood of a London taxicab.

The lessons from the "Look Right" example are, as with countless aspects of day-to-day life, applicable to voice user interface (VUI) design. For multilingual applications to be effective and successful, they must recognize that callers from different cultures will have different notions of what is intuitive, and this can have a profound impact on the design.

Interactions that are intuitive, by definition, don't require any additional instructions to the caller:

System: *"Do you want to hear the phone number again?"*

It's a simple question in search of a simple "yes" or "no" answer. No further explanation is necessary.

Interactions that are not intuitive require additional guidance:

System: *"Okay, I'll check availability for May 13. If I have the date wrong, say 'back up.'"*

There's nothing intuitive about saying "back up" in conversation to correct a date. But some form of instruction is called for because callers may be uncertain as to how to correct a misrecognized date. The above "say 'back up'" strategy compensates for what may not be intuitive to callers.

By Tom Houwing and Paul Greiner
VUI Group, VoiceObjects

One Of Us, Or One Of Them?

The "hear" and "feel" of an application will be interpreted within the context of each caller's culture. When it comes to a system's persona, the same regional accent that sounds endearingly homespun to one caller may leave another caller thinking he or she is dealing with a small-time operation. It's important to understand whether your Mexican Spanish callers will be put off in some way by a South American Spanish speaker, or vice versa. Does the other accent have positive or negative connotations for them? Some services are more sensitive than others when it comes to using accents. An accent may very well bring added value to a service with a regional identity. For example, in a travel application, the tourist guide with a local accent could bring the atmosphere of the tourist attraction to life. For more official public services, the designer may want to refrain from the use of

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accents because of the accessible-to-everyone character of the service.

During a ring tone download project, target group analysis showed that the service was primarily going to be adopted by preteens and teenagers, nine to 15 years old. Tests revealed that it was important to utilize the hip, slangy and informal language of this particular age group. Also, the prompts were recorded with young voices in order to connect with the callers' mental model and expectations. The "being-one-of-us" tone brought added value to the voice application. A formal prompt style would very much have a counter-effect, being inappropriate for this particular service character and target group. In multilingual applications, the prompt designer needs to be extremely aware of what's hip, slangy and informal in one language compared with another.

A banking application uses a banking language prompt style in a rather formal way. Even when the caller speaks more colloquially, he or she expects the system to adopt a more formal style. The mental model is set on banking, and to most of the callers, banking is serious business, with images of people wearing suits in formal settings.

In a certain bank, as a test, a young man was put behind one of the counters, dressed informally, with a baseball hat, sweatshirt and jeans. People entering the bank were avoiding him (especially younger clients!) and preferred to conduct their business with a formally dressed person. In this example, the "being-one-of-*them*" is a precondition in order to connect with the mental model and expectations of the caller. Formal language is a concept that differs from culture to culture. The prompt designer needs to be highly informed about the professional jargon in order to connect with the target group in the most effective way.

"You" Can Make A Difference

One of the most important considerations for a multilingual application is to pay close attention to the level of formality. Many languages around the globe make a distinction between a more familiar and a more formal *you* (e.g., French *tu/vous* or German *du/Sie*).

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For convenience, let's write the familiar and formal forms as "you" and "You," respectively. The conventions associated with when to use which form is as culturally unique as the languages themselves. Prompting with "You" in an application will create different mental models for callers of different cultures. In a German language application, "You" would be expected in all cases, except with a target audience composed exclusively of young people (for whom "You" would come across as authoritarian and alienating). For the general population, though, "you" might prove distracting to the caller at best — impertinent at worst. Although the Swedish language makes a similar "you"/"You" distinction, prompting with formal "You" would be the unnatural case, for young people and adults alike. The effect would be a detached and old-fashioned feel.

Investigations conducted by the Fraunhofer Institute in Germany show that, instead of a formal prompt style, a friendlier and more personal style is more suitable and effective in making the caller accept recognition failures, and it initiates cooperative caller behavior. System prompts that address a problem concerning speech recognition in an open and sympathetic manner are mostly perceived as being friendly and helpful. (As in: "Speech apps make mistakes too.")

VUI designers with a native-speaker feel for a given language might still exploit the effect that a shift in formality can provide. Consider this example, first in English.

System: *We have appointments available Thursday, Friday or the following Monday. Which would you like?*

Caller: *I'd like to come in on Saturday.*

System: *What was that?*

Caller: *Saturday.*

System: ***Nope, can't do it***. *Saturday's completely booked. I can offer you only Thursday, Friday or Monday. If you want to check your calendar, you can say "pause" and I'll wait until you say "continue again."*

The lack of any "you"/"You" distinction in English does not prevent the language from making a shift in the formality level. The last prompt, spoken with a smile, serves to break down the dialog's formality — for only a moment — to smooth over a rough situation and get the dialog back on track.

Now consider a German version of the same dialog, remembering that the German formal "You" is *Sie*, and that the familiar "you" is *du*.

System: *Es gibt mögliche Termine am Donnerstag, Freitag oder am nächsten* (There are possible appointments on Thursday, Friday or on next *Montag. Am welchen Tag möchten* ***Sie*** *vorbeikommen?* (Monday. On which day want You to come?)

Caller: *Ich möchte gerne am Samstag vorbeikommen.* (I would like on Saturday to come.)

System: *Verzeihung, bitte?* (Pardon, please?)

Caller: *Samstag.* (Saturday)

System: *Neh* ***du*** *(haha),* ***um Gottes Will****. Das geht leider nicht. Am Samstag sind (*No, you, for God's sake, that works unfortunately not on Saturday are) *wir zu. Es gibt nur noch Donnerstag, Freitag oder Montag. Bitte wählen* ***Sie****.* (we closed. There is only left Thursday, Friday or Monday. Please (you) make a choice.)

As with the English example, the system temporarily shifts away from the normal, more formal register in an attempt to bond with the caller, ease any frustration the caller may have, get the caller to refocus and bring him or her back on track. It's the IVR equivalent of a friendly pat on the shoulder.

[Fe]Male

One question that generally would not fit the mental model of speaking with a human agent is whether you are male or female. Countless prior telephone calls will have taught you how well your voice alone suggests to people whether they should call you "Sir" or "Ma'am." You know from past experience whether people in the local culture have any trouble guessing your gender from your traditionally male or female first name. You set your expectations accordingly.

> Speech recognition technology does not yet reliably exploit the pitch of a caller's voice to determine gender.

Speech recognition technology does not yet reliably exploit the pitch of a caller's voice to determine gender. And with a multicultural calling population, the system can't depend on first names. For instance, the French pronunciation of "Daniel" could be interpreted as "Danielle." "Pat," to English speakers, may be used for both male and female persons and does not clearly provide any information about gender. With Asian names, most Western people can only guess; e.g., "Chao" (Chinese) meaning "great one" may be used both for males and for females. The cost of guessing wrong is great, as the system will come across as unintelligent and alienating. Additionally, instructing the recognition machine to sort out which names are male and which are female requires extensive grammar design.

Consequently, the VUI designer needs to find out the intelligent way.

English is gender-neutral in certain cases:

English: *"Are you satisfied with the outcome of the survey?"* (gender-neutral)

The same example in Spanish demands more precision:

Spanish: *"¿Está contento con el resultado de la encuesta?"* (male)

"¿Está contenta con el resultado de la encuesta?" (female)

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The way out in the example above could be rewording the prompt, avoiding the use of a gender-sensitive reference to the addressee, with a phrase that literally translates "Is the outcome of the survey pleasing to you?"

Spanish: *"Le gusta el resultado de la encuesta?"*

Another strategy is to create a gender-neutral prompt using the equivalent of "one" or "any person." The same can be used to address both singular and plural referents:

Swedish: *"Man kann åka taxi till stan."*

(One could take a cab into town.)

But also: "It's possible to take a cab into town."

Where there's ambiguity, it's common for such languages to default to one gender. But, if the automated system is using the default gender in cases where a human generally wouldn't, the caller's mental model may be disturbed and the caller's evaluation of the system blemished. Therefore, even for a language like Spanish, alternative wordings that don't expose the limitations of the technology would be preferable.

… And For Icelandic, Press 94

What language will the dialog be in? Australian English, Japanese, touch-tone? Multilingual applications need to establish a mode of communication early on, as all subsequent interaction depends upon it. The "welcome prompt" needs to cover the initial information and, at the same time, to invite the caller to take part in the human-machine interaction, "inviting" the caller over the system threshold into a conversational dialog. Callers' expectations of the service they've called need to be taken into serious consideration. By leveraging the language instinct and creating a conversational dialog, the VUI design evolves in the direction of a natural, human-like interaction. VUI design is not about fooling callers into believing they are talking to a live call center agent, but rather making callers forget that they are talking to a machine.

When a multilingual service is accessed through a single telephone number, it's common to allow callers to express their preference.

System: *"To continue in English, say 'English.' Para servicio en Español, diga 'Español.'"*

The practicality of offering a language preference to callers diminishes as the number of languages grows. Callers could be forced to hear several prompts in languages they don't understand before being offered what they need.

Will the order of languages presented stir up political sensitivities? If there is a falsely accepted misrecognition, the only recourse to callers unable to navigate in a foreign dialog will be to hang up, and business could be lost. Depending on how well the caller base's language might map to location (think European Union), the caller's ANI (automatic number identification) might be used to presume which language should be used for the opening prompt.

Alternatively, the IVR could work with a companion Web site, on which callers could register their phone number (for ANI) and a language preference. The system, in turn, would know with which language to greet that person the next time he or she called. Imagine an example of a voice portal supporting hundreds of services. These single services cannot be "reached" through the use of short cuts; too many short cuts would lead to deteriorated recognition. In this case, the designer may want to give the caller the option to create a personal set of short cuts ("favorites") through a companion Web site. Take, as an example, the German toll-collect system, where truck drivers would need to select a language from a variety of welcome prompts in different languages. In this particular case, simply registering on a companion Web site once would solve the problem, connecting the registered phone number to the pre-selected language.

> VUI design is not about fooling callers into believing they are talking to a live call center agent, but rather making callers forget that they are talking to a machine.

Some Assembly Required

Making concatenated prompts sound natural in any language requires careful planning during the prompt-writing stage, in addition to meticulous coaching during the prompt-recording stage. Each part must have the appropriate prosody (intonation, emphasis, pitch and rhythm), so the expressiveness of the concatenated whole will not be compromised. Consider that addresses are expressed differently in different countries, with the house number either preceding or following the street name.

1492 King Street:

English: Fourteen | ninety-two | King Street.

French: King Street | Mille | quatre-cent | quatre-vingt douze
(King Street | Thousand | four hundred | ninety-two)

German: King Street | Vierzehn | hundert | zweiundneunzig
(King Street | Fourteen | hundred | ninety-two)

Danish: King Street | Tusen | firehundrede | toochhalvfems
(King Street |Thousand | four hundred | ninety-two)

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Dutch: King Street | Veertien | tweeennegentig
(King Street | Fourteen | ninety-two)

Swedish: King Street | Etttusen | fyrahundra | nittiotvå
(King Street | One thousand | four hundred | ninety-two)

The address elements will need to be recorded with final or non-final intonation, based on the format used. Also, the variety of sentence structures that different languages present means that there may not be a one-to-one correspondence between the concatenated parts, even in languages as similar as English and German.

English: *"I found | three | Thai restaurants | in Toronto."*

German: *"Ich habe| drei | thailändishe Restaurants | in Toronto | gefunden."*
("I have | three | Thai restaurants | in Toronto | found.")

Speaking The Same Language

Multilingual designs must address both the linguistic differences and the cultural differences of callers. The issues go far beyond simply translating the prompts. "Speaking the same language" means more than just using words that the other person understands; it also means that the mental model, which a caller forms from the interaction, is the intended model and not a mental model that is tarnished by awkward prompting or cultural insensitivity. No one today will dispute the fact that the most effective and successful voice user interface designs are user-centered. For this to remain true for multilingual applications, it's vital that the needs of each linguistic community be addressed at the earliest stages of the design process. Otherwise, even the most brilliant design can get lost in translation. **CIS**

Tom Houwing is VUI Services Manager at VoiceObjects and Paul Greiner is Voice User Interface Designer. VoiceObjects (http://www.voiceobjects.com) (news - alert) is a provider of voice application management systems (VAMS). The company's VoiceObjects X5 product portfolio enables companies to easily create, test, deploy and analyze voice applications with the industry's best IDE on a carrier-grade, server-based platform.

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Fax: 303-928-2832
Web: http://www.raindance.com

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	Named User	Subscription	Per-Minute
List price — for 10 users or 10 seats	*$399 per month; Audio charged at $0.18 per minute per caller.*	*Starts at $125 per seat per month; audio charged at the customer's negotiated rate.*	*Starts at $0.38 per minute per participant; audio charged at the customer's negotiated rate.*
Description	*"User model" allows unlimited meetings with up to 10 participants for a designated user.*	*"Room model" allows unlimited meetings with up to 10 participants at any given time.*	*Pay-per-use model lets users "test the waters" first. Allows unlimited meetings charged on a per-participant per-minute basis.*

As gas prices continue to rise, traveling for business meetings becomes a very expensive proposition, making Web conferencing a much more attractive idea. Raindance, a Web conferencing provider with $75.3 million in revenue in 2004, is the fourth fastest-growing company in Colorado. The company sent TMC Labs a demo account to try out its hosted audio/video/data conferencing solution. Featuring integrated voice, video and data, is the application highlight that gives Raindance a competitive advantage over many of its competitors, which include Microsoft and WebEx. Because it's a completely integrated audio/Web/video solution from one provider, you have one access number, one tech support team, one bill and one place to go for help, versus "single" play offerings, which require multiple points of contact, multiple bills, etc. Raindance also features a 24x7 customer support center, and the company claims to be able to handle over four million minutes per day with 500 T1s, 3 OC12s. Raindance also contends it is both carrier-grade and the only conferencing solution to publish its uptime (99.99 percent). Raindance was the first company to provide reservation-less audio conferencing, so we were excited to check out the company's voice/video/data conferencing application.

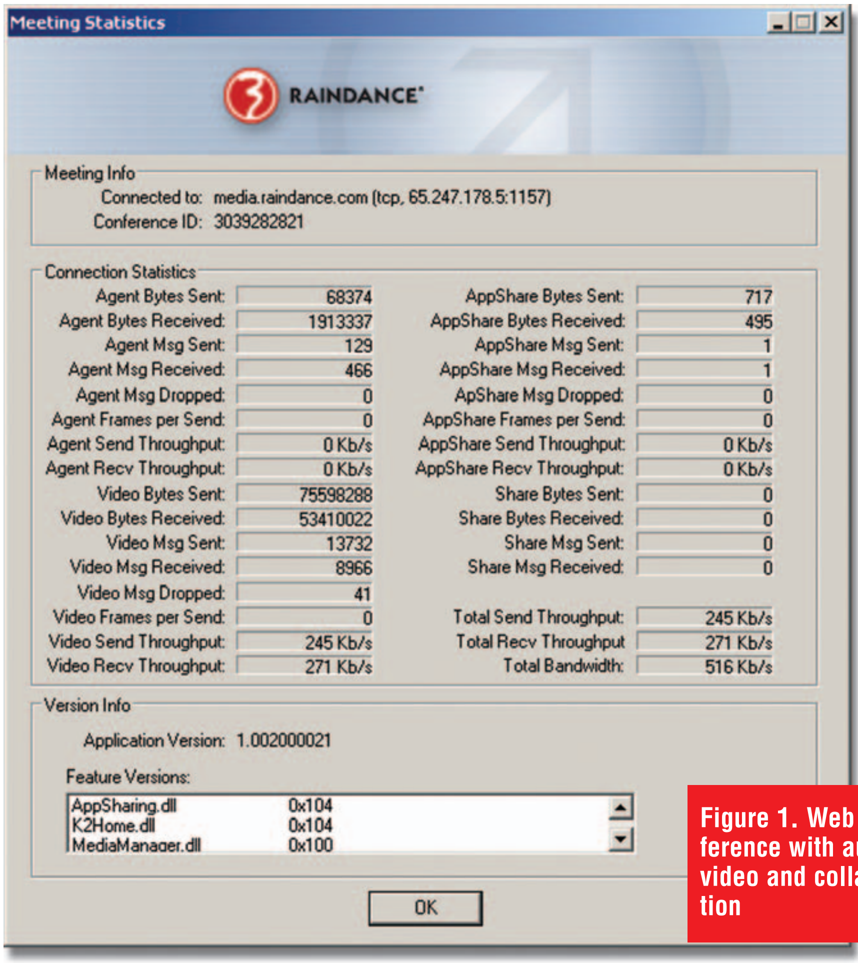
Installing Raindance was a snap. We simply went to http://www.raindance.com/rndc/register/rfmCorpDownload.jsp and clicked *Install*; we then entered our conference I.D. and PIN and chose a security question and answer; finally, we entered our passcode and clicked *Log In*. Literally, we had it installed in fewer than three minutes. After logging in, we were presented with the profile screen for entering our information. We also had the option to enable Microsoft Outlook integration for integrated scheduling; in fact, unlike competing conferencing solutions that build their own calendaring system, Raindance leverages the ubiquitous Outlook e-mail/calendar client for scheduling conferences.

For our first conference, we actually attended a meeting hosted by Raindance and the company's public relations firm. As you can see from the screenshot (Figure 1) of the Web conference, we had both video displayed and the application-share feature displaying PowerPoint slides. Surprisingly, Microsoft Live Meeting has no integrated video. Also, WebEx is only single-point video, and you can view only the moderator. During our Web conference, we were able to share and edit documents, as well as our entire desktop, in real time.

We should point out that Raindance has acted upon a number of compression techniques, in relation with both the video and the application sharing. When sharing a PowerPoint presentation, you can even see transition effects that many competing application-sharing products remove due to bandwidth concerns. Further, the video uses a unique way of transmitting video. Raindance actually utilizes still frame JPEGs to transmit the video, enabling you to quickly switch from viewing one participant's video to viewing another participant's video, whereas streaming video technology would take a second or two to buffer down the video. A statistics window (Figure 2) allows you to view the various network statistics, including bandwidth consumption.

The Raindance application has several noteworthy usability enhancements. For instance, it has a "follow talker" option that will switch the displayed video to the speaking person. This helps in emulating a real meeting when the person speaking has the floor. There was about a five-second delay

RATINGS (0–5)
Installation: 5
Documentation: 5
Features: 4.75
GUI: 5
Overall: A



Meeting Statistics

RAINDANCE®

Meeting Info
Connected to: media.raindance.com (tcp, 65.247.178.5:1157)
Conference ID: 3039282821

Connection Statistics

Agent Bytes Sent:	68374	AppShare Bytes Sent:	717
Agent Bytes Received:	1913337	AppShare Bytes Received:	495
Agent Msg Sent:	129	AppShare Msg Sent:	1
Agent Msg Received:	466	AppShare Msg Received:	1
Agent Msg Dropped:	0	ApShare Msg Dropped:	0
Agent Frames per Send:	0	AppShare Frames per Send:	0
Agent Send Throughput:	0 Kb/s	AppShare Send Throughput:	0 Kb/s
Agent Recv Throughput:	0 Kb/s	AppShare Recv Throughput:	0 Kb/s
Video Bytes Sent:	75598288	Share Bytes Sent:	0
Video Bytes Received:	53410022	Share Bytes Received:	0
Video Msg Sent:	13732	Share Msg Sent:	0
Video Msg Received:	8966	Share Msg Received:	0
Video Msg Dropped:	41		
Video Frames per Send:	0	Total Send Throughput:	245 Kb/s
Video Send Throughput:	245 Kb/s	Total Recv Throughput	271 Kb/s
Video Recv Throughput:	271 Kb/s	Total Bandwidth:	516 Kb/s

Version Info
Application Version: 1.002000021
Feature Versions:

AppSharing.dll	0x104
K2Home.dll	0x104
MediaManager.dll	0x100

Figure 1. Web conference with audio, video and collaboration

before it switched to a new person speaking — not too bad. You can also manually view any of the participants who may at that time be sharing video. Another notable usability feature is the ability to view the Web conference in full screen simply by pressing the F11 function key.

One unique feature to Raindance is its integrated billing codes. Professional services want the ability to bill back for time spent on a conference (whether it's simply a conference call or a full-fledged Web conference with audio). Raindance facilitates this option via its integrated billing codes. It is also useful in enterprises with multiple departments that need separate billing for budgetary reasons.

Concerning security, Raindance has done well. You can set 128-bit encryption on a stream-by-stream setting. So, for example, you can encrypt application and document sharing, but if you don't care about encrypting video and chat, you can choose not to do so. In addition, you can set a passcode for the meeting to prevent unauthorized access to your meeting's Web link.

Room For Improvement

There is no VoIP support at this time, so we would like to see Raindance set up a media gateway on the company's network to terminate inbound SIP callers using a SIP (define - news - alert) phone or SIP soft client. While the quality may not be as high as PSTN (define - news - alert) during Internet congestion periods, we feel customers should make that choice for themselves. Raindance could still charge a per-minute rate, but perhaps a slightly discounted one because inbound VoIP calls to Raindance's data pipe are obviously much more cost-economical than inbound PSTN calls, which use more expensive TDM (define - news - alert) ports.

Conclusion

Raindance is so confident in its product that the company offers a free, unlimited version that allows you to perform a one-on-one, "person-to-

PROS and	CONS
Multiple-point video	No VoIP support
Video follows speaker	
Outlook integration for scheduling	

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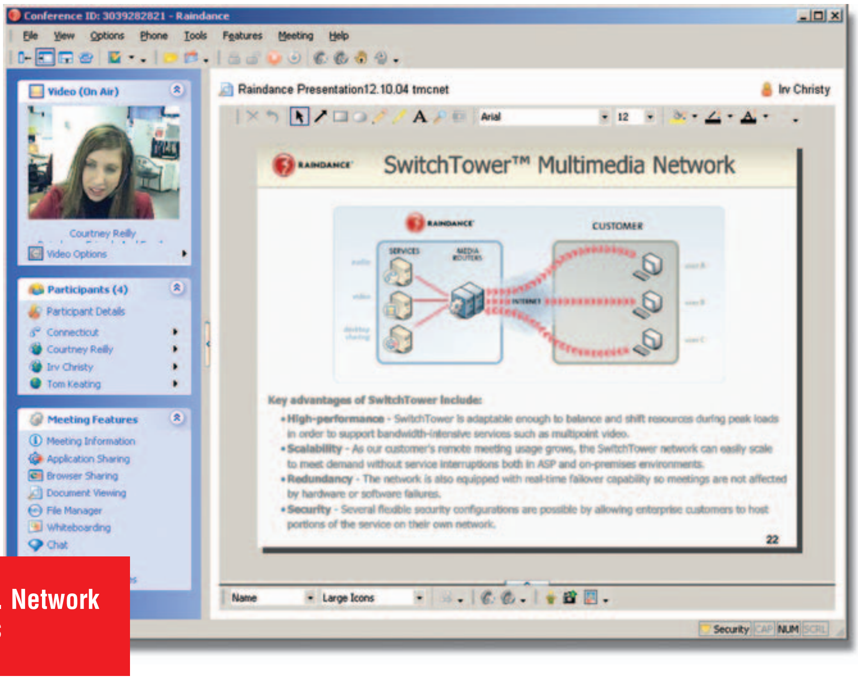
person" Raindance meeting. While limited to only one-on-one, as opposed to including multiple participants, this allows customers to try it free of charge. TMC Labs commends Raindance for giving potential customers the ability to try a product before buying; more importantly, however, we were impressed with the features of Raindance Meeting Edition. The user interface was very clean and easy to navigate. We loved the video capabilities, and we would highly recommend this hosted conferencing solution. **CIS**


Conference ID: 3039282821 - Raindance
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Phone
Tools
Features
Meeting
Help
Video (On Air)
Courtney Reilly
Video Options
Participants (4)
Participant Details
Connecticut
Courtney Reilly
Irv Christy
Tom Keating
Meeting Features
Meeting Information
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Browser Sharing
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- **Redundancy** - The network is also equipped with real-time failover capability so meetings are not affected by hardware or software failures.
- **Security** - Several flexible security configurations are possible by allowing enterprise customers to host portions of the service on their own network.

Figure 2. Network statistics

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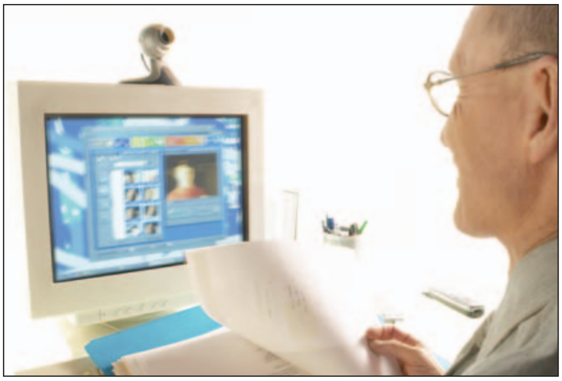

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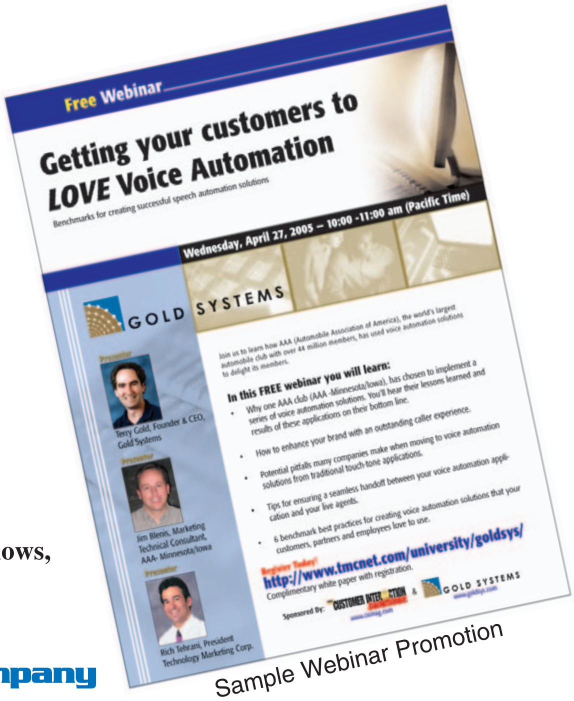

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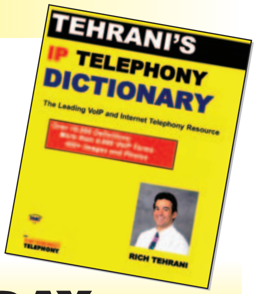

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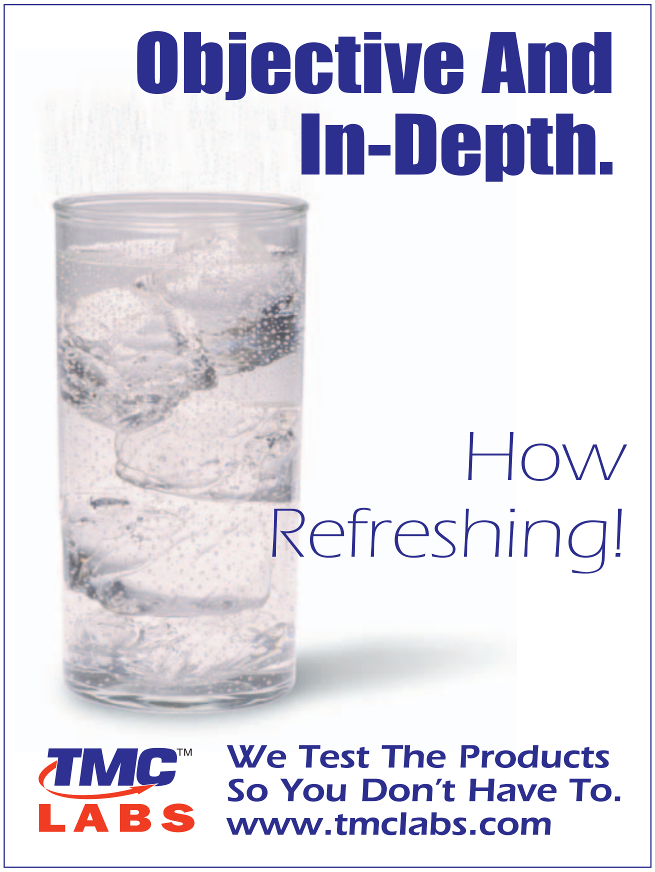

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A. and is mailed approximately the 1st of each month. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: **CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®**, Technology Marketing Corporation, P.O. Box 21642, St. Paul, MN 55121 U.S.A.

To subscribe, call toll-free: 800-243-6002. If busy, call 203-852-6800 or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, $49. All Canadian subscribers, $49. All Foreign (air mail), $85. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

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By Tracey E. Schelmetic
Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

A Mental Perambulation Betwixt The Minefields Of Technological Syntactic Horrors And Acronymic Zealotry

The world is getting more complicated, but you knew that already. It's not because our cars talk to us, our refrigerators are more intelligent than we are and we have devices that communicate our thoughts three minutes before we think them. Our language, too, is getting more complicated, particularly in the business world.

Do you, like me, yearn for the days of "customer service software" and "e-mail management" companies rather than companies designated by 97-word euphemisms you can read three times and still not understand? Do you trip through designations of Smith & Jones Corp. as a "best-of-breed accounting and financial management enterprise of forward-thinking genius and backwards-facing financial adjustments of convenience and ethics complications avoidance solutions" company? Have you ever noticed that the longer these industry appellations are, the less descriptive they become?

Have you recently run across an acronym you know you're supposed to know (as an industry expert), but cannot figure out what the hell it stands for, regardless of how many sources you consult? Do you ever get the impression that industry insiders are simply throwing in made-up acronyms to confuse you and make their insights seem more sophisticated?

Have you ever ditched your plans to purchase a piece of software called ÄSol-Ü-tioNN® because you have no idea how to spell it, write it or pronounce it and you don't want to look like an idiot in front of the board?

If so, you're not alone. Many marketing programs drifting through the tech industry today forget that there is a disconnect between how people speak about companies and how they read about them. If you name your company "Acme Integrated Messaging Management And Multimedia Optimization (IMMAMO) Group, LLC: A U.S. Division Of A Subsidiary Of Verybigcompany & Sons & Nephews & Neighbors Technology Incorporated", know that when I refer to you in conversation or in blogs, you'll be called Acme Corp., and everyone will privately imagine Wile E. Coyote zooming past repetitive cacti on rocket-propelled roller skates when your company is discussed.

Just remember that during an average press conference, for example, while you're discussing your epically named company and several of your products, and your partner and its products of galactic appellations, you may inadvertently end up tacking on an additional 20 minutes of talk time just to conquer the pronunciations of the names of your own intellectual properties. We members of the press, notorious already for our short attention spans, are likely to become bored by the fifth mention of "prodigious mobile international field sales and service customer-facing delivery enhancement optimization on a wireless, lemon-scented platform" and wander away into the press room to inspect the tray of baked goods and fight over the last can of Diet Coke.

There is nothing that fills me more with horror than a nine-page press release that contains exactly seven sentences and more incomprehensible symbols than the funerary cartouche of an ancient Egyptian lawyer.

Publishing in the tech industry becomes difficult, as well. At *Customer Interaction Solutions®*, for example, staff-written articles and contributed features must be arduously worked over by myself, the Director of Advanced Best-of-Breed Predictive Perspective Optimization; and David Butcher, Handcrafter of Forward-Looking Technological Literary Value Propositions and Hyperbolic Prevention. We then pass the prototype magazine on to Lisa Morris, Artistic Overseer Of Aesthetically Optimized Customer-Directed Interior Graphical Rhetoric, and Alan Urkawich, Surface Design Engineer Of Exterior Customer-Facing Expression.

I look forward to the day when the fashion will come around again (as fashions always do) for minimalism in business terminology: product and industry sector names so spare they'd bring tears of admiration to the eyes of those artists who paint huge canvases one color and sell them for $2.5 million a piece.

Until then, we'll continue to sort through products that offer enterprisewide, cross-JUJUBEE-compliant, preconfigured, upward-facing, prebuilt, analytically strategic and on-demand data-flipping mission-critical accelerated wireless cross-platform processes.

It's enough to give an editor a severe recurring cranial pain event characterized by the engorgement of the network of human cerebral blood vessels. **CIS**

The author may be contacted at tschelmetic@tmcnet.com.

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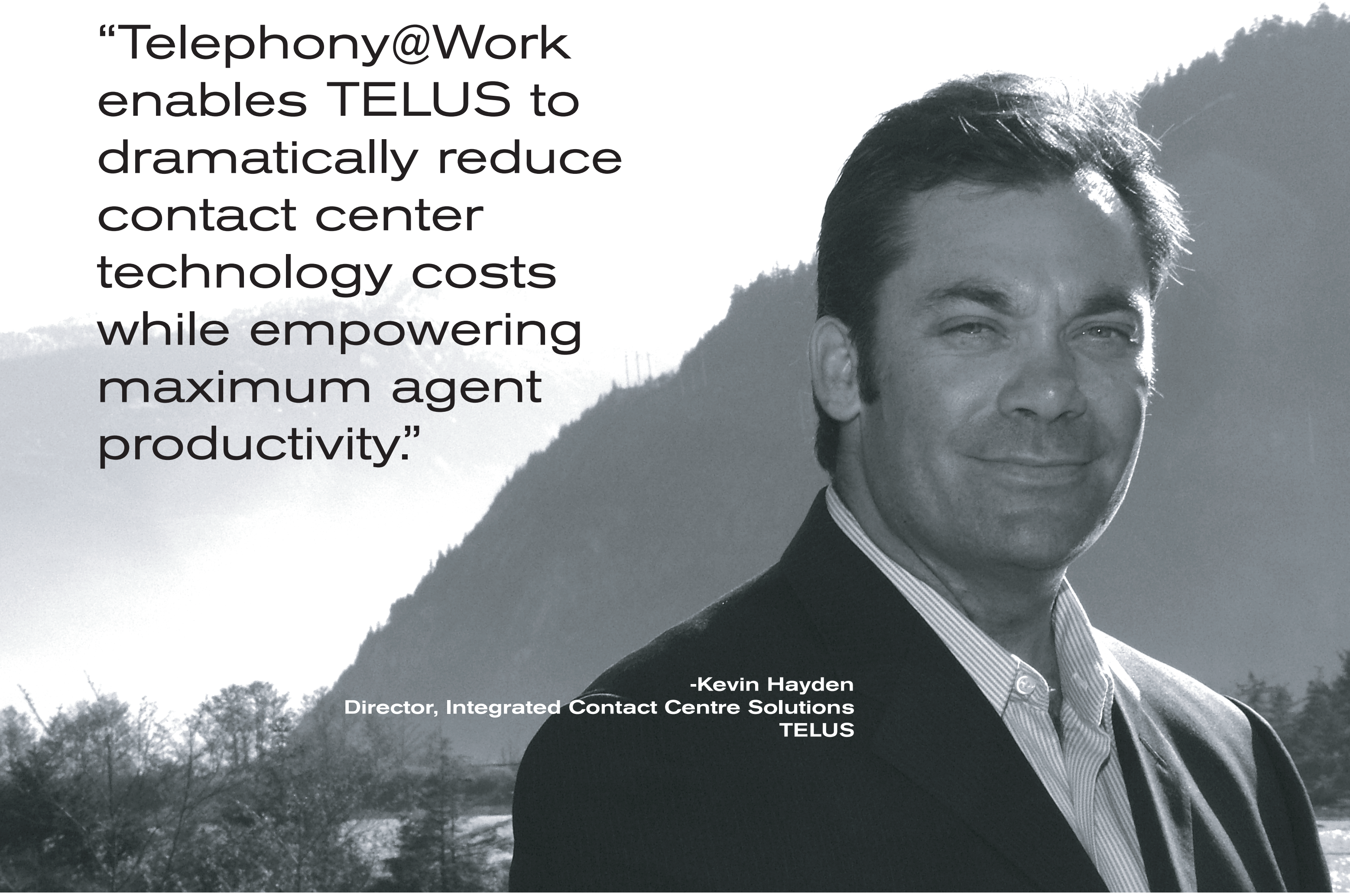

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