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#1 In CRM, Call Centers And Teleservices Since 1982

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# Market Dominance

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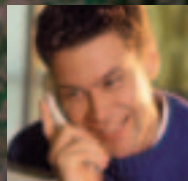
- Saving Money With Self-Service
- 20th Annual Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking (Outbound)
- Left Bank Solutions' Chuck Ciarlo In The CEO Spotlight
- IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Awards

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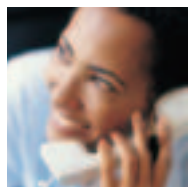
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By: Nadji Tehrani,  
Executive Group Publisher,  
Technology Marketing Corporation

# The New Paradigm For Market Dominance

## For VoIP Technology, Teleservices & CRM...

### Introduction

As I indicated in my January 2005 editorial, the contact center/CRM industries are positioned for tremendous growth in 2005 and beyond. Barring unforeseen developments, we firmly believe that this will be the case. By the time you finish reading this editorial, I am sure you will be convinced as well.

During the past month, I attended a call center conference and exhibition. I am happy to share with you that better than 90 percent of the companies I contacted indicated that sales has definitely picked up and the outlook is exceptionally bright for continuous growth.

As the leading publication of the call/contact center and CRM industry

firmly believe that teleservices companies will be the bridge that connects technology and CRM for every corporation. I will now look at each one of these sectors and how they are interrelated.

### A. VoIP Technology

In my view, and as I have indicated in my last dozen editorials, a golden opportunity exists for **savvy contact center management to become early adopters of VoIP (define - news - alert) technologies** in order to take advantage of this truly cutting-edge and advanced technology, not only to vastly increase the capabilities of your contact center, but also to drastically reduce cost. As we all know, in today's highly competitive global business environment, competitive cost structure is the key for survival.

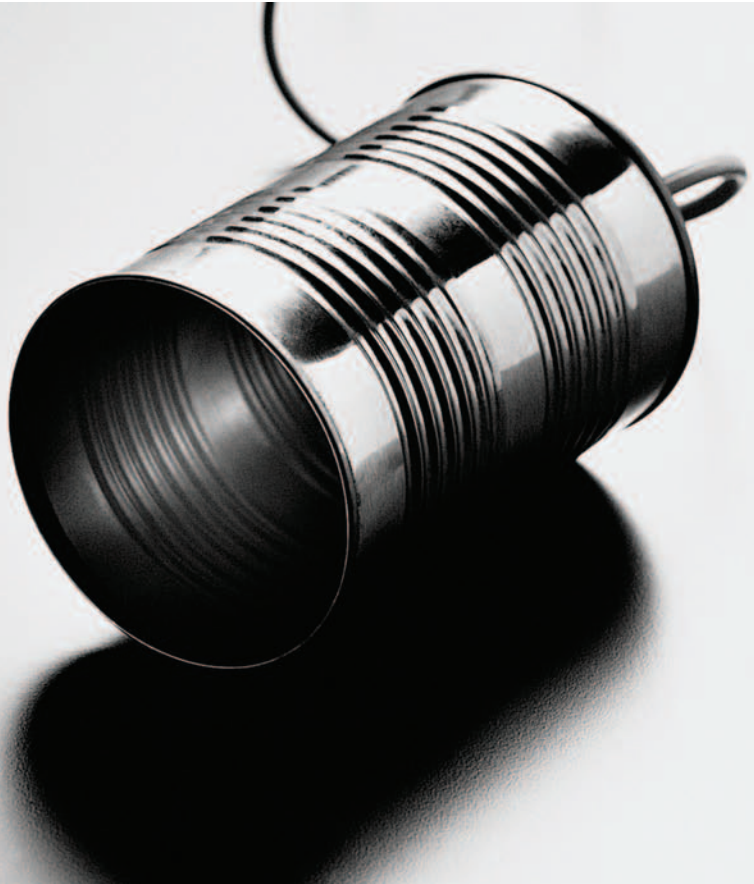
Proper convergence of people with emerging new technologies such as IP contact center and speech technologies is the key.

There are those who feel they can compete effectively by acquiring advanced technologies. Nothing could be further from the truth. Far more important than technology is the development and enhancement of the abili-

**Proper convergence of people with emerging new technologies such as IP contact center and speech technologies is the key.**

since 1982, it is our responsibility to look at every possible new way to help our industry, readers and vendors to avail themselves of the latest trends for successful and profitable operations within the call center/CRM industry. Having said that, I would like to bring to your attention our new vision. We

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CONTACT CENTER SOLUTIONS

A middle-aged man with grey hair is laughing heartily, his head tilted back and mouth wide open. He is wearing a yellow polo shirt with black trim on the collar and sleeves, and grey trousers with a black belt. The background is plain white. A blue graphic overlay, consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes, cuts across the middle of the image. The text "Insight = happy customers" is written in white, sans-serif font on the blue overlay.

Insight = happy customers

ties of the contact center personnel, which play a far greater role than just technology. In other words, senior management must realize they need to effectively converge and blend the new technologies with well trained and cultivated call center personnel in order to ensure success. And let me make it abundantly clear that this is a zero-tolerance situation. In other words, there is no room for mistakes and/or shortcuts.

## B. Teleservices: The Bridge That Connects Technology And CRM

The philosophy of outsourcing the teleservices side of a business to a reputable, award-winning teleservices agency stems from the fact that not every company has what it takes to be an expert in technology, teleservices and CRM. This is where teleservices outsourcing companies function as the bridge that connects technology, people and CRM functions. As I have frequently stated, "If it is not your core-competency, outsource it."

## C. Domestic Outsourcing Companies Enjoying Significant Growth

The outsourcing companies that have demonstrated award-winning quality, training, flexibility and adaptability to customer needs are those that will continue to grow domestically for the reasons explained previously.

Companies that have the above attributes and have the ability to use powerful marketing skills are the fortunate ones that will enjoy phenomenal growth (please refer to my February 2005 Publisher's Outlook at <http://www.tmcnet.com/cis/0205/po.htm>).

Over the last two years, I have maintained in these editorials that savvy companies do not need to go offshore for high-end services such as CRM, customer care, customer retention and customer acquisition. All of these functions can be done effectively with a reputable domestic outsourcing company.

The fact that several high-quality, award-winning teleservices companies are showing phenomenal growth domestical-

## Congratulations To Award Winners

As the industry's leading publication since 1982, it is our distinct honor to congratulate all award winners of the 20th Annual Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking (outbound) and the winners of the IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Award featured in this issue. By winning these coveted awards, you have distinguished your company as one of the very best in your sector. Be sure to inform your target audience of this great news, for awards without marketing and differentiation are wasted! Please read my Publisher's Outlook titled "Award Marketing" at <http://www.tmcnet.com/cis/0203/0203po.htm>.



ly shows that companies have discovered that: 1) it's not prudent to send your customer database, let alone CRM functions, halfway around the world; and 2) you will only lose customers when you expose them to non-English speaking agents who are rude and not culturally aligned with U.S. customers. I am sure that you have read my comments in these editorials that "companies live or die from repeat business." When rudeness, lack of proper communication due to poor English and drastically different culture problems come in, then customers are lost by the hundreds. When there is no customer, there is no repeat business!

## The Logic Behind The New Paradigm

Successful companies are those that focus on what they do best and outsource what is not their core-competency to a reputable company. This outsourcer will speak the language of your customers and share the values and culture of your customers. Common sense dictates that it is nearly impossible to be 100 percent proficient in advanced technology, teleservices operation and applications, as well as all of the sophistication needed in the implementation of CRM. The absence of this philosophy may be the main reason why many companies that have tried to implement CRM within their organizations have failed. The only logical solution that comes to mind is that organizations must allow teleservices companies to do the job of bridging the gap to avoid loss of customers.

## Winning Companies In The Spotlight

As explained in my January 2005 edi-

torial titled, "The Dawn of a New Era" (<http://www.tmcnet.com/cis/0105/po.htm>), the domestic contact center industry is, once again, enjoying rapid growth and profitability. In this issue, I would like to feature three exemplary companies that have demonstrated outstanding performance.

## Concerto Software Posts Another Record Year: 75 Percent Revenue Growth in 2004

For the year ended December 31, 2004, Concerto Software achieved total revenue of \$188.5 million, an increase of 75.7 percent over 2003 total revenue of \$107.3 million. Product revenue for the year ended December 31, 2004, was \$84.7 million, an increase of 76.4 percent over 2003 product revenue of \$48.0 million.

We at TMC congratulate Concerto Software for their truly outstanding success.

## Millennium Teleservices Earned The No. 1 Ranking In The Top 50 Outbound

We asked Lisa Slader, President of Business Operations at Millennium Teleservices, to share with us the key to the company's admirable success. Here are the results:

**NT:** To what do you attribute your success at being the No. 1-ranked outbound teleservices agency?

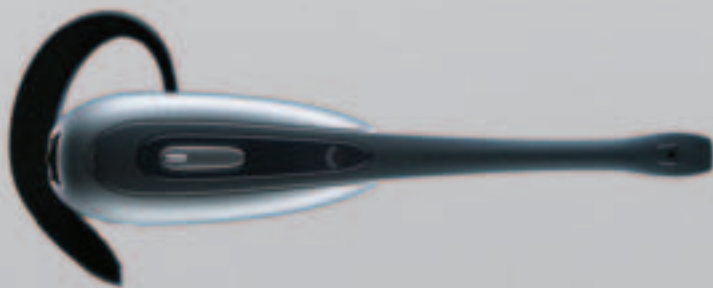
**LS:** Much of Millennium's success can be attributed to our decision to remain committed to outbound telemarketing while many of our competitors chose to abandon this channel. Additionally, in response to the challenging regulatory environment, we chose to invest in our



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most valued asset, our people. Through increased training and development, we have been able to remain both compliant and competitive.

**NT:** During our last conference call, you spoke of "a highly sophisticated training program." Would you please briefly elaborate/explain?

**LS:** Actually, our training programs focus on the basic principles of selling skills, effective communication and product knowledge. It is the reinforcement and ongoing coaching and development that make it so successful.

**NT:** In your judgment, what do domestic outsourcing companies have to do in order to compete with offshore companies?

**LS:** We believe the key to competing in this channel is focusing on delivering

quality, performance and responsiveness.

### **InfoCision Moves Up Four Levels To No. 4 In The Outbound Top 50 Ranking**

We asked Steve Brubaker, Senior Vice President — Corporate Affairs at Infocision Management Corporation, to share with us their key to success. Here are his remarks:

**NT:** To what do you attribute your success at jumping so dramatically to No. 4 for domestic outbound?

**SB:** Through extensive training and call monitoring, InfoCision has established itself as the highest quality call center company in the world. Our trademarked Q3 quality control process monitors every Communicator (or agent) and ensures that each phone call meets our clients' high standards.

**NT:** Please briefly describe/explain your training program.

**SB:** InfoCision considers training critical throughout an employee's tenure with the company. Not only have we implemented a rigorous orientation program for new employees, but training continues as employees grow and experience new opportunities.

Our workforce development model includes constant monitoring, evaluation feedback and coaching for our Communicators. We also operate our own corporate university, IMCU, which provides supplemental training and even college credit. We work with local universities to build classes on issues such as diversity in the workplace, advanced Microsoft applications, public speaking and more. IMCU offers employees excellent opportunities to improve their skills and advance in their careers.

**NT:** In your opinion, what do domestic outsourcing companies have to do in order to compete with offshore companies?

**SB:** The biggest advantage we have over offshore outsourcers is that our employees speak the language of U.S. customers. They can communicate without the cultural barriers that exist in foreign countries. We have found that the best way to compete is to invest in quality control, agent training, compliance and advanced CRM technology. These crucial elements enable us to deliver a superior return on investment for our clients.

As always, I welcome your comments. You can e-mail me at [ntehrani@tmcnet.com](mailto:ntehrani@tmcnet.com). I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming Speech-World™ Conference, co-located with our IP Contact Center Summit and Global Call Center Outsourcing Summit, on May 24-26, 2005, at the Westin Park Central Hotel in Dallas (<http://www.speech-world.com>). **CIS**

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

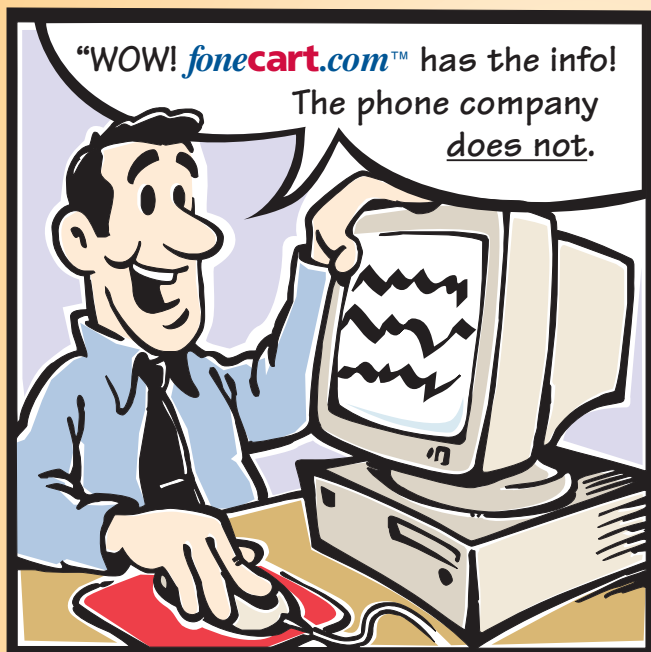
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By Michael Chavez, ClickFox

*For many customers, navigating an IVR feels like walking while wearing a blindfold. Customers can be easily confused when the rules change from step to step. In an ideal world, a customer would enter an IVR system, tell it what the desired task is, and it would route the customer to the proper area of the application. In reality, creating this perfect IVR is a very difficult endeavor.*


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### **VoIP Predictions Revisited**

By Rich Tehrani, Group Editor-in-Chief, Technology Marketing Corporation  
*At the Internet Telephony Conference & Expo in Miami, February 2003, I made some predictions about where the industry was going. At the time the market was still slow and in fact, by today's standards it was downright depressing. It wasn't until the last quarter of 2003 that things started to slowly heat up. Lots of people are making predictions about the future these days, so I decided to go back and see how my predictions fared.*  
To read the full article, please visit <http://www.tmcnet.com/96.1>.

### **VoIP Security, Part I: The Problem**

By David Sims, TMCnet CRM Alert Columnist  
*As the recent Paris Hilton kerfuffle shows, the word "kerfuffle" is grossly under-used in discussions of VoIP security. In this three-part series we'll look at the main issues of VoIP security and how they're being met.*  
To read the full article, please visit <http://www.tmcnet.com/97.1>.

### **Shrinkage in Call Center Operations**

By Bill Durr, Principal Solutions Consultant, Witness Systems  
*Shrinkage — an odd term — is employee time you pay for but get no work. WFM professionals are keenly aware how important shrinkage is in creating a set of schedules that optimizes agent labor and still meet contact center performance requirements.*  
For the full article, please visit <http://www.tmcnet.com/98.1>.

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**Executive Group Publisher**  
Nadji Tehrani (ntehrani@tmcnet.com)

**Group Publisher**  
Richard Tehrani (rtehrani@tmcnet.com)

**Editorial**  
203-852-6800 (cispress@tmcnet.com)  
**Editorial Director**, Tracey E. Schelmetic  
**Assistant Editor**, David R. Butcher

**TMC™ Labs**  
203-852-6800 (tmcclabs@tmcnet.com)  
**Executive Technology Editor/CTO/NP**, Tom Keating

**Art**  
203-852-6800 (cisart@tmcnet.com)  
**Senior Art Director**, Lisa D. Morris  
**Art Director**, Alan Urkawich

**Executive Officers:**  
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Richard Tehrani, *President*

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**Circulation Director**, Shirley Russo ([srusso@tmcnet.com](mailto:srusso@tmcnet.com))

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Kevin J. Noonan, ext. 124 ([knoonan@tmcnet.com](mailto:knoonan@tmcnet.com))  
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*Executive Director, Business Development*

Karl A. Sundstrom, ext. 119 ([ksundstrom@tmcnet.com](mailto:ksundstrom@tmcnet.com))  
*Global Accounts Manager*

**Editorial Offices** are located at  
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understanding you and your customers

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

## A Desperately Needed Term

With all of the progress we've made in the last two decades with respect to communications, including telecom deregulation, the fax machine, cellular phones, e-mail, chat and WiFi ([define](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)), it's ironic that communications are essentially more inefficient today than they have been during any other time in the past 10 years.

One may argue that the advent of the cellular phone was a boon for productivity and efficiency, and e-mail allows us to communicate more effectively. The reality is that the more devices and modes of communications we invent, the more inefficient we become. An inordinate amount of time is spent trying to find each other in this world where everyone is supposed to be connected 24/7.

In order to contact people today, it's necessary to call their office phones, cell phones and home phones; send them e-mail messages and instant messages; call their secretaries and so forth — simply to connect. Assuming that in the end you can't find them, you have left a trail of possibly incomplete e-mails, IM messages and voice mails in different mail-

analysts estimate that over 60 percent of all voice communication consists of listening to or leaving voice mail! Murphy's Law tells us that when you check these boxes, other, more important messages are in turn being banished to your cellular or office voice mail system.

The problem gets worse when customer-facing workers are not able to take phone calls in the same prioritized system a company designates according to customer value. In other words, a top customer should always get through to a top salesperson, while it may be acceptable to put lesser customers on hold for a few minutes during peak calling times. Top customers sending an e-mail message should be responded to within minutes. In most companies, these customers aren't even identified, let alone dealt with in a prioritized manner. In many companies, in fact, e-mail messages from customers still don't get answered!

When a boss calls an employee, the call should always be taken, unless, of course, the employee is on the phone with an important customer (some might argue any customer. Again, there must be rules that can be individualized to coincide with company priorities). Currently, if a boss calls an employee who is on the phone with anyone, regardless of whether it is work-related, the call from the boss goes into voice mail. Of course, this assumes no caller I.D. or related technologies are being utilized. If the employee isn't diligently checking voice mail, he or she may not even know the boss needs to communicate.

**Communications, in my opinion, are broken, or at least severely damaged. We are becoming less efficient in dealing with the human elements of communication. Technology is making our lives more challenging.**

boxes. How does the contact know which box to check first? Worse, how do people know which voice mails are more important and which e-mails are crucial, and do they really check these mailboxes in a timely manner?

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The same issue arises when a spouse calls. At our last ITEXPO in Miami, most of the audience indicated that they would take a call from a spouse under every circumstance. I do this myself. How many times have you been interrupted in an important meeting to answer the eternal questions, “What do you want for dinner?” or “Can you stop by the dry cleaner?” Many times we know who is calling, but it’s more important to know why.

Communications, in my opinion, are broken, or at least severely damaged. We are becoming less efficient in dealing with the human elements of communication. Technology is making our lives more challenging. Today, we all keep in touch with many more people than we ever could have a decade ago, all because of IM, cell phones and e-mail. Our lives are becoming unmanageable. Virtually everyone I know works on their e-mail on nights and weekends. There is simply no other way to keep up. I am not advocating the cessation of work, but I am advocating technologies that help automate those tasks that can be automated.

There are so many things we need to have at our disposal. Companies need to be able to set up *ad hoc* conference bridges, with the ability to use application sharing and white boarding technologies. All vital employees need to be remotely connected to their offices when they are on the road. They need to be seamlessly connected so when their office phone rings, they take the call.

Prioritization by caller is only part of the equation, as priority level needs to naturally take into account the reason for the call. Interrupting a customer call to take a call from the boss only to find out that she wants to know if you want chicken or fish at the company luncheon is counterproductive. Similarly, a top customer calling to cancel or initiate a million-dollar contract is an essential call and should be routed immediately to the highest level within a company. To use a poker analogy, this call would be considered a “royal flush.” To put it another way, a million-dollar customer

call should be answered by the CEO if no one else is immediately available!

Similar to the way a contact center can set up calling queues for callers dialing in for different reasons, individualized contact queues need to be established for individuals. For example, if you call a reservation center, callers are queued based upon their needs — a trip to Disney, Europe, the Caribbean, etc. Similarly, individuals need contact queues organized by the needs of the caller.

This is the next level of presence, or something I have referred to in my live presentations as “Presence Genius.”

In this scenario, callers should not have a phone ring unless the priority is above a certain level. In all other cases, the call will result in a request for a conversation via a desired communications medium, such as phone, e-mail or chat. Automation can even auto-schedule a phone appointment between parties as long as the priority level is established and verified.

An example: I don’t want to be interrupted by a call from a family member inviting me to dinner if I have a terribly busy work day. However, if I’m being called due to a family emergency, then of course I need to be interrupted.

Communication by its very nature is inefficient, and in a world where productivity increases are increasingly important, we need to squeeze more inefficiency out of how we interact with one another. We need to keep in mind that technology changes themselves are peripheral; it’s the solutions that should be foremost in our minds. Technology exists to solve problems, not for its own sake.

The good news is that companies are trying to solve these problems. The concern I have is that they’re all going about it in the wrong way. At the last ITEXPO in Miami, in fact, many keynote speakers talked about how they would solve this communication disconnect. If you listened closely to their presentations, they all called what they are doing by a different name. Here are some examples of what various vendors call this sort of technology: VoIP; productivity-boosting applications; converged applications; communications

software; mobility solutions; real-time communications, etc. There are probably 100 different descriptive phrases floating around that are meant to describe the same thing.

Are these companies kidding? Who on earth is going to buy these solutions in bulk if we describe them in 100+ different ways? Can you imagine a company getting presentations from five PBX vendors that all call their applications by a different name? That’s how it works today! These technologies are essential, yet we aren’t seeing fast enough adoption because CFOs could care less about this stuff. I don’t blame them. VoIP was adopted quickly once the industry agreed on this term. Call centers grew quickly once we agreed on a term. CRM is another term that literally turned into a multibillion-dollar market overnight! We need a term that isn’t “real-time communications,” as some analysts like to tout. This is totally wrong.

When you are on vacation in Hawaii and your cell phone rings and your boss calls to ask you if you want chicken or fish at the company luncheon, real-time communications is exactly what you don’t want.

So what do I advocate as a term? Because we’re trying to wring efficiency from communications and make us all more productive, maybe we should take note of the ideas and terms that were applied to manufacturing and resulted in the term “just-in-time” (JIT) manufacturing. Borrowing a term that works and makes sense, we should call our principle “just-in-time communications.”

We are all trying to solve the same problem, and if we want to be taken seriously by CEOs and CFOs, we had better agree on a term and stick with it. This term has implications for consumers, contact centers, enterprises, government and the military. It works for every vertical market out there, from financial to insurance to medical. It just plain works, and it’s desperately needed if we’re going to climb to the next level in communications. The next time you’re in an important meeting and you take a call that isn’t so important, think “just-in-time communications.” **CIS**

# Puerto Rico: The Ideal Contact Center Location.



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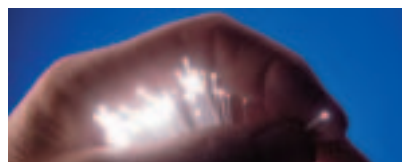
## An Operations Haven

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- Abundant real estate available at highly competitive rates.

- Federal and Municipal workforce assistance programs are available, as well as training and incentives packages.

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- 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.
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- No import duties on call center equipment.

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**Chuck Ciarlo**  
CEO  
Left Bank Solutions, Inc.



This month, the CEO Spotlight is on Chuck Ciarlo, CEO of Left Bank Solutions, Inc. (<http://www.leftbanksolutions.com>).

**CIS: What is your company's specialty and mission statement?**

**CC:** Left Bank Solutions is an enterprise software provider specializing in workforce optimization solutions for contact centers throughout the world. Left Bank Solutions' mission is to help businesses leverage their workforce investments for efficient deployment of critical resources and effective management of people processes, significantly impacting customer service levels and business profitability.

Monet, the integrated workforce optimization solution offered by Left Bank Solutions, provides customers with powerful workforce optimization systems that allow for immediate, measurable gains in customer service levels and reduction of contact center costs. By providing a complete suite of contact center optimization solutions, Left Bank Solutions delivers actionable business intelligence.

**CIS: What makes your solution unique and how can users benefit by using it?**

**CC:** Our primary purpose has been to provide affordable, world-class call center technology to centers of all sizes. Up until the introduction of the Monet Workforce Optimization suite, alternative systems were priced and targeted toward the very largest of centers, leaving small and medium centers with a choice of using spreadsheets, manual processes or less-than-adequate tools to manage their centers. Today no other workforce optimization vendor can

match the price-to-value relationship we deliver or provide quicker ROI. Our solution is also implemented and deployed in days, rather than months, without the need for a team of professional service people arriving at the customers' doorstep ready to camp out for weeks. The Monet Workforce Optimization suite is comprised of a feature-rich and tightly integrated workforce management, quality monitoring evaluation, Web-based agent performance measurement and analytics, and data collection services that can be purchased and deployed individually or together as a complete suite.

**CIS: What is your vision of the future of the contact center industry?**

**CC:** Today there is an increasing awareness among C-level executives that the contact center is of strategic importance to the overall success of their enterprises. In many cases, the contact center is the first touch point between the customer and the business and, therefore, in today's competitive business landscape, service becomes paramount. Increasingly, call centers are becoming a more integral part of many enterprises, not just cost containment divisions. Through our customers, we see trends, such as increases in service objectives from answering 80 percent of the calls in less than 20 seconds to 90 to 95 percent within less than 10 seconds. However, this service comes at a cost. So how do centers balance the service versus the cost? Enterprises of all sizes need to review their contact center tech-

nology and determine the holes within their technology and deploy the latest solutions that have proven to improve service delivery and reduce costs.

**CIS: What, in your opinion, is the most pressing issue facing our industry today?**

**CC:** From the customer side, without a doubt, it has to be service. It is transparent to a consumer if he or she is contacting a center that employs 1,000 agents and uses the latest contact center technology, or a small center that has older technologies or is without critical workforce optimization technology. Therein lies the frustration: inconsistent service experiences for the consumer. What makes matters worse are poorly architected IVRs or auto-attendants that trap consumers for long periods of time without any clear path to a live agent.

In an attempt to remove the agent bottleneck and reduce costs, some companies are sending customer calls to off-shore locations, such as India and the Philippines. This too, if not managed properly, can have a negative impact on service.

From the business side, there are missed opportunities. Think of a first interaction from a caller who is a gold customer. The opportunity is ripe to improve loyalty, cross-sell and upsell, and gather customer information. But the reality is that usually the customer is handled by a less experienced agent who will fulfill the request more slowly or will not take time to gather additional information or upsell this customer. The

Increasingly, call centers are becoming a more integral part of many enterprises, not just cost containment divisions.

next missed opportunity could be a complex technical question, where the issue needed to be resolved on the first call, thereby reducing follow-up costs and enabling the agent to impress the customer. In reality, however, the customer joins the second queue to get expert help. If the issue is not resolved on the first call, the cost per issue increases significantly, with follow-up calls and e-mails to the contact center. Another example is a request made in a foreign language. This chance to effectively communicate with the cus-


tomer will reduce costs, initiate a positive customer response and will increase customer loyalty. But the reality is often that a non-linguist answers the call. The result is confusion and the need to pass the call to another agent.

**CIS:** What are your recommendations to alleviate such problems?


**CC:** In centers where service is an issue and current corrective measures are not helping when it comes to improving

service levels and balancing the costs, enterprises must consider implementing a workforce optimization solution. This, in most cases, will automatically increase service levels across all channels and contain or reduce center costs. Agents who have the right skills will be in place at the right times, which will improve first-call resolution. By implementing workforce optimization solutions, enterprises can also seize many missed opportunities to build customer loyalty and revenues. **CIS**

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




# 2005 CONFERENCE CALENDAR




**May**  
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Dallas, Texas

<http://www.speech-world.com>



**August**  
**2 - 3, 2005**  
San Francisco, California

<http://www.voipdeveloper.com>



**October**  
**24 - 27, 2005**  
Los Angeles, California

<http://www.itexpo.com>

For information on any TMC conference, contact Dave Rodriguez:  
**203-852-6800, ext. 146** or  
[drodriquez@tmcnet.com](mailto:drodriquez@tmcnet.com)

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## http://www.tmcnet.com

# 2005 Recommended Vendor List

## The TMC Seal of Approval



The following Recommended Vendors have distinguished themselves by winning one or more of TMC's coveted awards, earning them the TMC Seal of Approval.

### Teleservices Outsourcing

West Corporation



InfoCision Management Corporation



### List and Sales Lead Databases

infoUSA



Jacada



Left Bank Solutions



### CRM/Contact Center Software/Hardware

Amae Software



Aspect Communications Corp.



Davacord (formerly VoiceLogger)



GN Netcom



IEX Corporation



Mercom



Sennheiser Electronic Corporation



Spectrum Corporation



Stratasoft, Inc.



Telephony@Work



Witness Systems



For information about how to get on the Recommended Vendor list, see <http://www.tmcnet.com/mediakit/cis04/soa.htm>

The features we like most are the easy-to-read displays and the clear, crisp sound of the .wav files. - **PODS, Inc** We were up and running the same day. I would recommend it to others because of its dependability, reliability and fantastic customer support.

- **Classic Limousines** ... very competitively priced, very customer friendly in the area of configurability, and very easy to use. Without a doubt it's the only application that I've ever installed in my 25-year career where everything from implementation to training went completely as planned.

- **Service, Electronic Transaction Consultants** We looked carefully to find a recording company that met our extensive list of requirements and couldn't be happier with the solution they had for our trading company.

- **Samco Trading** The DigiVoice XE is easy to use and completely reliable. The best system out there today.

- **Phillips** The recording is far superior to our old system and we now have instant access to any recording on our network.

- **AXIUS Communications** Very reliable, very easy to use, very easy to train on. It doesn't overburden you with things you don't need, but gives you the ability to scale up to things you need later.

- **Comcast** I don't think you'll find a better value for the price you'll pay and the system is very friendly.

- **University of South Florida**



# Everybody's Talking about Davacord not just because they were known as VoiceLogger

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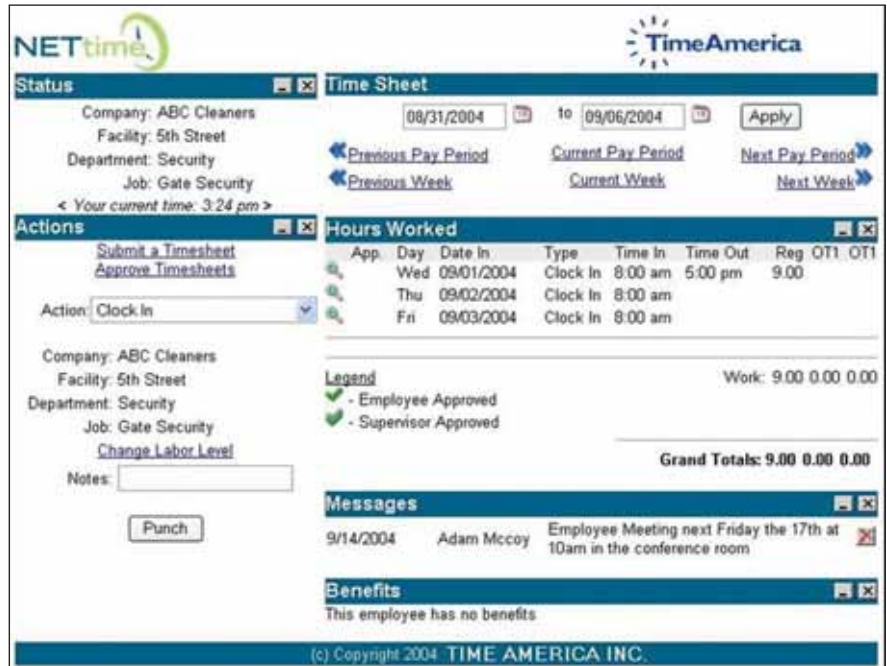
## NETtime: No Use For Anachronous Time Card Processes

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

Do you remember your first summer job as a teenager, wherein you had to “punch the clock” four times a day by sliding the paper time card into that large machine attached to the wall? When you slid the card in, the machine made that same loud sound as that old computer printer did when the printer chewed the paper, gurgled and died. Maybe you worked at a place where management didn’t notice a single absent employee; and at that place of employment you worked with an ethically flexible co-worker who would tag-team with a buddy, clocking one another in or out so that he could skip an entire day at the office but still be clocked in throughout that day and, therefore, get paid for it without being physically present.

Those antiquated paper time cards and accompanying wall-mounted behemoths are simply ineffective and too time-consuming for management to be at its most efficient, especially when used by a company that has a large number of employees.

Managing employee time is a process that is no longer a luxury of convenience but is a necessity if a company wants to stay efficient or, in fact, wants to become *more* efficient. Companies must optimize their workforces in order to stay competitive while still staying aware of cost. After all, a company’s workforce is its most valuable asset, and manual time reporting or spreadsheet-based time reporting (or often an inefficient union of



both) can create an administrative purgatory, a lack of real-time reporting, and constant post-issue adjustments and corrections.

Time America’s NETtime (<http://www.timeamerica.com>) is a Web-based time and labor management solution designed to make improving labor management processes easier for companies and, in doing so, decreasing their costs associated with employee time and attendance tracking.

Time America’s product does more than simply eliminate manual computation of paper time cards or time sheets, though. The solution provides accurate data for decisions regarding workforce, and it enables companies to gain greater control over operational productivity. Provided as either a hosted solution or as an in-house, licensed application, Version 6 offers an improved, more streamlined and user-friendly interface, as well as more features and improved functionality.

NETtime’s primary purpose is to manage employee time, and this newest version offers enhanced employee self-

service features. Accessible from anywhere in the world via an Internet connection, employees submit time sheets or clock in/out via the Web or badge terminal. To prevent fraud, employees can only clock in and clock out at specified IP addresses. Functionality for Web-enabled cell phones and PDA devices has also been added for job tracking and time tracking, so employees can enter time through a Web browser, phone, time clock or any WAP-enabled device. The solution provides more flexibility for filtering departments and jobs; it enables the tracking of employee hours spent on specific jobs and/or within each department.

A significant enhancement with Version 6 is the addition of 15 labor levels, wherein employees clock in for certain tasks, making the latest version a “beefed up” solution in comparison to the previous releases, according to Bahan Sadegh, the company’s chief technology officer.

For payroll policy enforcement, NETtime Version 6 has the ability to handle more complex payroll rules for overtime and union groups. The solu-

tion offers Wizard-driven payroll closing, and it enforces payroll policies such as overtime rules, attendance rules, rounding rules, schedules enforcement, and lunch and break policies. Shift differentials for wage rate variations can also be implemented.

Additional functions and features include the following:

- **Record keeping:** Can automatically track vital employee information.
- **Job costing/tracking:** Can track number of hours spent on each job by each employee; identify cost of jobs or how much to bill a customer.
- **Benefit accrual tracking:** Can set up rules for how benefits should accrue, based on how long an employee has been with the company; accrue and track vacation, sick and personal time (or customize to accrue other types of benefits); and supervisors can run reports against employee data to perform job costing, to control departmental costs, to monitor staffing and to track benefit administration.
- **Messaging:** Can send employee messages, accessible on the NETtime employee home page.
- **HR function automation:** Can track employee attendance; track employee tardiness; and export time and other human resource data to a company's payroll, accounting or enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, providing a seamless labor management process.
- **Management reports:** Can schedule recurring management reports with e-mail notification; and automated e-mailing of over 50 management reports that can be sent to one person or a group of specified people in a variety of file formats.

With built-in, live text-to-speech, a telephony option and live VoIP integration with Cisco, electronic "pegs" show employee actions live. No software installation is necessary for the client or the server, and system requirements consist of only an Internet connection and an Internet browser. The user interface is customizable for each administrator or

employee. Administrators and employees simply log on to the Internet using their favorite browser (Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator Web browsers are specifically supported), enter their user name and password and can then add, edit or delete information.

For small, medium-sized and enter-

prise-sized businesses to be able to improve efficiency of their labor management processes — to meet the environment's high volume and availability requirements — this Web-based automated application offers a simple yet feature-rich solution. **CIS**



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**MicroStrategy Offers New Business Intelligence Technology**

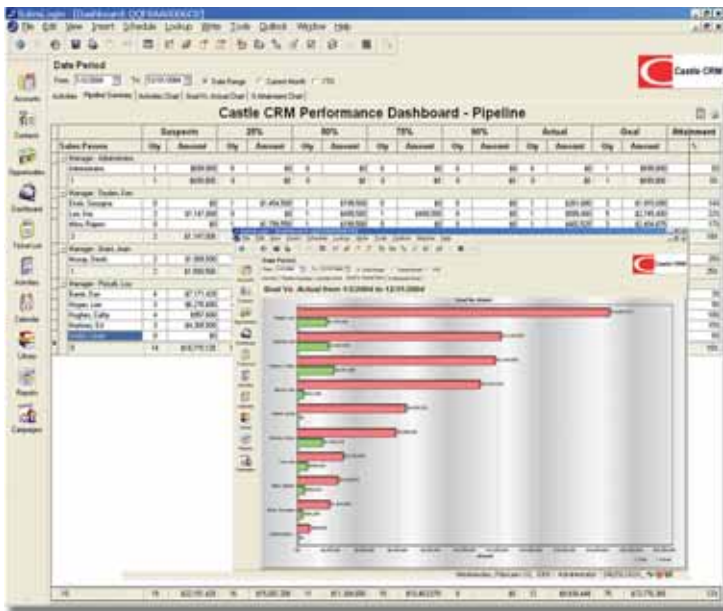
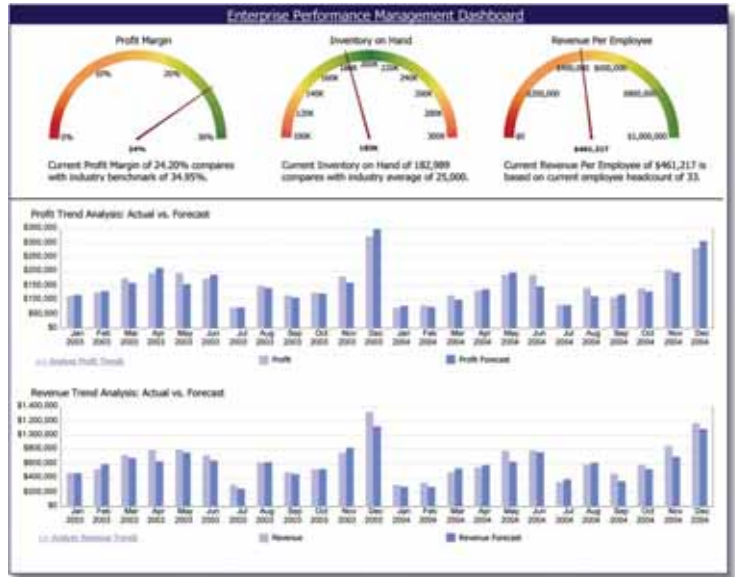
**MicroStrategy Incorporated**, a provider of business intelligence software, has announced the release of MicroStrategy 8, a new business intelligence technology that integrates enterprise reporting, analysis and continuous performance monitoring into one BI platform. With easy-to-use functionality and more than 2,000 enhancements, MicroStrategy 8 can allow a greater number of business people to access more of their enterprise data, helping them to make better business decisions.

With MicroStrategy 8, companies no longer need numerous distinct products from different vendors to provide reporting, analysis and performance monitoring. With a scalable architecture and a single metadata, users can navigate from scorecards and dashboards to reports and analysis without being forced to open and close multiple BI tools and navigate dissimilar interfaces.

MicroStrategy 8 also features a newly designed Web interface that helps make business intelligence more approachable for the average business user.

Additionally, MicroStrategy 8 broadens the universe of data sources that business users can access for their reporting and analysis activity. Business users can now directly query data stored in their financial, human resources, supply chain and other operational systems, without having to first move this data into a data mart or data cube.

<http://www.microstrategy.com>



**Castle CRM Offers Executive Dashboard Solution Based On SalesLogix Enterprise**

**Castle CRM**, a customer relationship management (CRM) consulting and application development company, has released a new services solution for building executive dashboards via Best Software's SalesLogix Enterprise Suite.

The services offering, called the SalesLogix Executive Dashboard Solution, combines new integration products with a deployment methodology designed to deliver a dashboard application rapidly and at lower cost. The typical application combines performance metrics with enterprise search, to give executives a way to respond to events as they emerge across the business.

Building on best practices, Castle CRM Consulting Services is now offering a structured program to help companies deploy a variety of dashboards, including the following: executive dashboards; CIO dashboards; finance dashboards; sales dashboards; customer support dashboards and production dashboards.

<http://www.acastle.com>

## Quaero, NetReflector Partner, Optimize Marketing Through Customer Satisfaction Measurement

**Quaero** — a provider of marketing consulting services, marketing automation, turnkey solutions and CRM outsourcing — and **NetReflector** — a provider of online survey technology and best practices consulting and methodology — have announced a strategic partnership involving the integration of NetReflector's customer satisfaction and loyalty measurement capabilities into Quaero SpringBoard's hosted relationship marketing service. Quaero and NetReflector have joined forces to optimize marketing through customer satisfaction measurement capabilities for their mutual clients.

Quaero SpringBoard is a Web-accessed, hosted relationship marketing service that provides business managers and marketing teams with easier implementation and lower risk in managing customer and prospect information and executing effective and measurable marketing programs. NetReflector helps corporations enhance their profitability by assessing the satisfaction and loyalty of their audiences anywhere in the world, in any language, in real time. Its flexible and high-value feedback solutions combine robust online survey technology with best practices consulting and methodology.

"This partnership ensures the integration of the voice of the customer into business processes in real time for optimal customer satisfaction and loyalty measurement," NetReflector President and CEO Vilette T. Nolon said.

<http://www.quaero.com>

<http://www.netreflector.com>



## Acxiom Announces Consumer Segmentation Solution For Marketers

**Acxiom Corporation**, a provider of customer and information management solutions, has announced the introduction of an enhanced consumer segmentation solution that can allow marketers to grow their business through a better understanding of their consumers within a country — coupled with the ability to compare those consumers across countries.

The new solution, Personix International, results from the combination of Acxiom's customer data management and the extensive data assets attained when Acxiom acquired Claritas Europe and Consodata last year.

"Traditionally, marketers rely on country-specific demographics and geo-demographic systems such as Acxiom's Personix product," said Bruce Carroll, Acxiom's Strategic Development Leader. "These solutions are optimized to perform within a given country and as a result do not allow for effective comparison of consumers between countries. Personix International changes that."

The new system is being made available internationally, starting with the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, the U.S., Poland, the Netherlands and Portugal, underlining Acxiom's intentions following the acquisitions it has made over the last 18 months.

<http://www.acxiom.com>

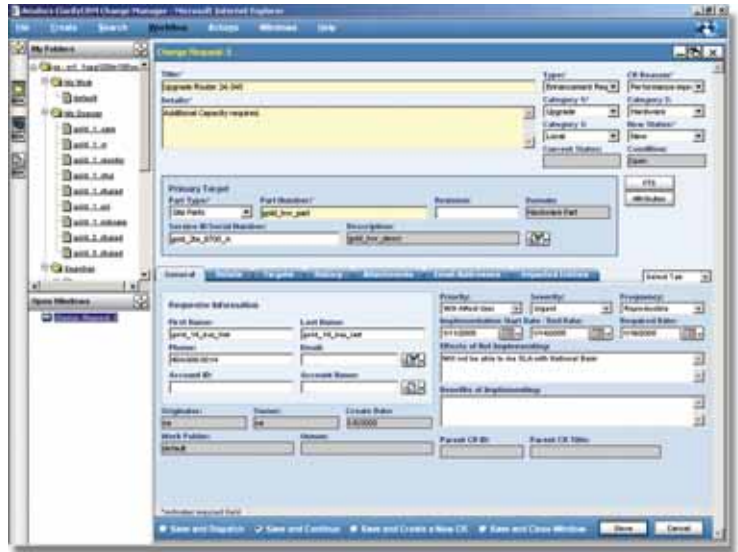
**Amdocs Announces Customer Mgt Portfolio v6, Consulting Services, SAS Alliance**

**Amdocs**, a provider of software and services for enabling integrated customer management and the customer experience, has launched Amdocs 6, a pre-integrated portfolio of modular billing, CRM, self-service, order management, mediation and content revenue management software products for easing accelerating adoption of an integrated customer management strategy for telecommunications companies. The intention is to deliver a customer experience that creates stronger, more profitable customer relationships. Key products within the Amdocs 6 portfolio include Amdocs Billing 6; Amdocs CRM 6; Amdocs Order Management 6; Amdocs Content Revenue Management 6; and Amdocs Mediation 6.

The company has also unveiled Amdocs Consulting Services, new and expanded consulting capabilities to provide customers with better integrated customer management (ICM), reducing execution risk. Among the new consulting services is the ICM Benchmark Service, part of an overarching ICM Blueprint Framework. It will facilitate creation of an integrated customer management strategy and vision based on the customer's unique situation, taking into account investments, goals, competitive environment, etc.

Finally, Amdocs and **SAS**, a provider of business intelligence software, have announced the two companies' formation of a global strategic alliance to deliver advanced marketing automation and business intelligence solutions to CSPs. Together, the two companies intend to enable service providers to track and analyze valuable customer data and dynamically present the resulting intelligence via operational support systems, such as billing, call center and ordering.

<http://www.amdocs.com>  
<http://www.sas.com>



**InStranet Announces v5.0 Of Contact Centers In-Line**

**InStranet, Inc.**, a provider of multiple-channel knowledge applications, has announced the release of Contact Centers In-Line (CCIL) 5.0. The new release of this application is intended to ensure automated delivery of profile-based sustainable content and knowledge to every customer touch point.

Contact Centers In-Line 5.0 is an application that can both proactively deliver and provide customer-facing organizations access to a single, consistent repository of company product, service and procedural information that can be customized, filtered and searched on in real time, regardless of the access channel or location. In addition, CCIL 5.0 provides one out-of-the-box interface to manage all customer touch points and to automate the processes of how they receive this knowledge.

With Contact Centers In-Line 5.0, InStranet introduces a series of Web-based desktops that can improve knowledge delivery to key customer touch points and guides users step-by-step toward the appropriate information depending on their profile, the relevant company products or services in question and the context of the interaction.

<http://www.instranet.com>



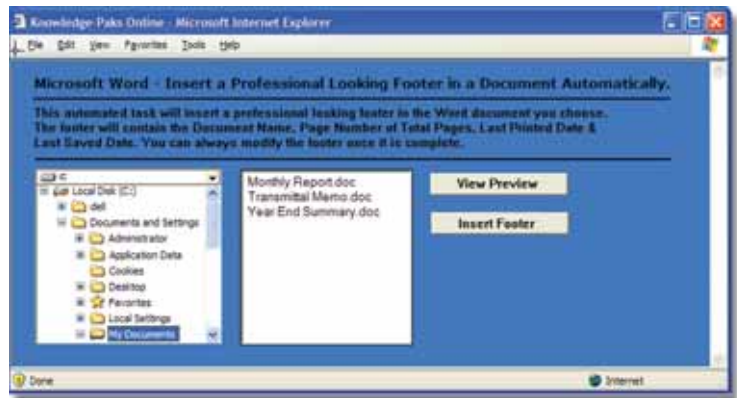
### RightAnswers Offers New Add-On Multimedia/Automated Solutions

RightAnswers, LLC, a knowledge solution provider in the technical support knowledge base market, has announced two new solution types to help provide its customers with turnkey knowledge-enabled support and enhanced self-service capabilities. The two available-now solutions, Show-IT and Automate-IT, are new add-on modules intended to expand the capabilities of RightAnswers' Knowledge-Paks product line and to provide multimedia tools and wizards to enable employee self-service.

Show-IT offers multimedia solutions that deliver full-motion video and voice instructions to guide an end-user through the correct way of solving a problem or issue. These multimedia solutions, which involve the manipulation of data or text, run between two and five minutes in length. Navigation buttons are also included so users can stop, play, rewind or fast-forward the video at their own convenience.

Automate-IT offers wizard-like scripts that automate and implement a multistep solution. Launched from a Knowledge-Pak solution, Automate-IT solutions automate a group of tasks that form a larger solution. "With our new Show-IT and Automate-IT solutions, help desks can dramatically improve their support levels and give end users additional tools to solve problems on their own," Jeffrey Weinstein, president and CEO of RightAnswers, said. "This allows help desks to optimize their agent resources without compromising service levels."

<http://www.rightanswers.com>



### Dictaphone Launches New ContactPoint Software Release

Dictaphone Corporation's Communications Recording Systems (CRS) group, a provider of recording and monitoring systems for contact centers and workforce relationship management solutions, has announced significant feature enhancements to its ContactPoint Workforce Relationship Management solution for contact centers.

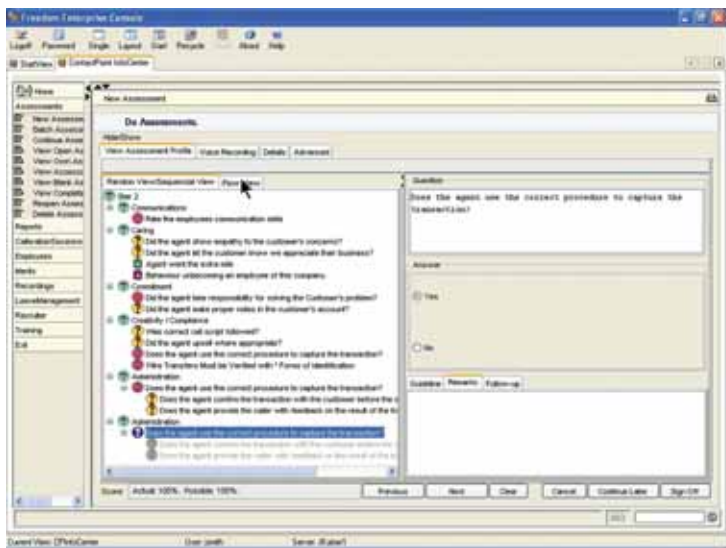
Dictaphone's ContactPoint Workforce Relationship Management solution provides a fully integrated solution for optimizing agent performance, focusing on three major functions: recruiting, training and assessments. The ContactPoint software suite is comprised of three modules – Recruiter, Trainer and Assessor – all linked together through a common competency model detailing the skills, knowledge and abilities agents need to be successful.

Once identified and captured in ContactPoint, this competency model can be applied to the contact center's hiring, training and assessment programs to increase agent effectiveness and improve customer service. Included among the new ContactPoint features: an assessment workflow tracking engine; a report schedule for flexible, automated reporting; and enhancements to ContactPoint Trainer, which allows contact centers to import SCORM-compliant training material and to deliver that material directly to agents' desktops.

"ContactPoint's new features give contact center managers even better tools for optimizing performance, such as enhanced tracking of coaching and training activities, and more flexible, automated reporting capabilities," John Kaiser, vice president of global marketing for Dictaphone CRS, said.

The new ContactPoint software release is available immediately.

<http://www.dictaphone.com>



**Symon Announces Community v2.8 As Advanced Scheduling, Forecasting Solution**

Symon Communications, Inc., a provider of contact center and enterprise performance, workforce management, productivity and management solutions, has announced Symon Community 2.8. This, the newest version of the company's browser-based workforce management tool, is intended to deliver an affordable and easy-to-use advanced workforce management solution for sophisticated contact centers.

Community's new product improvements were added to provide companies with a more affordable, powerful, Web-based workforce management tool, enhancing productivity by controlling and optimizing operational expenses.

Advanced features in Community Release 2.8 include Composite Scheduling, which allows users to group multiple schedule types together for assignments to agents or groups as steps in a rotation. This enables a single schedule assignment to represent multiple schedule templates, addressing variable business operations and work patterns for different days of the week.

Community users, particularly those with hyper-threaded servers, can see an overall performance increase with enhanced High Performance Forecasting (HPF). The major benefit of the improved HPF feature is the time required to create and optimize agent requirement forecasts. Administrative tasks are simplified with new Forecast Job Manifest, Forecast Status Monitor and Community's AutoApprove Service for automatic system evaluation of time-off requests.

Community Release 2.8 also includes new reports that expand on the existing integrated Adherence, Schedule Analysis and Intraday Performance Reports, providing the contact center with a broader view of its management and operational performance.

<http://www.symon.com>



**FrontRange Offers HEAT 8.3 To Improve IT, Support Organizations**

FrontRange Solutions has announced HEAT 8.3, the latest version of the Service Management solution. Version 8.3 is intended to allow customers to provide greater stand-alone service management and to also easily integrate with modules from FrontRange's new IT Service Management (ITSM) solution at a customer's own pace.

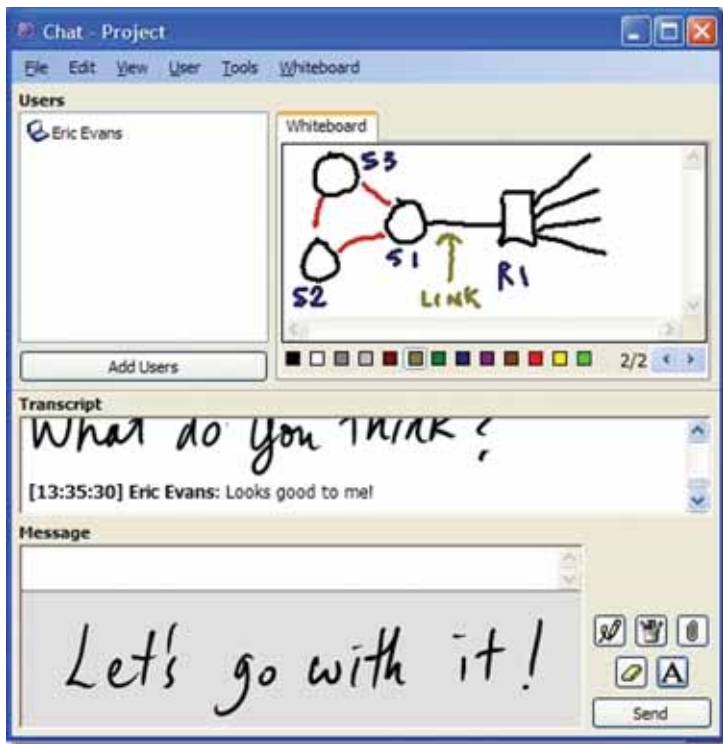
Both HEAT 8.3 and ITSM 5.01 from FrontRange are designed to improve the performance of IT and support organizations by providing functionality fully compatible with ITIL, a standard for service management best practices.

The new modules available for HEAT allow users to expand functionality: problem management; change management; release management; configuration availability management; and service level management.

As the solution is built on the Microsoft .NET platform, the integration capability of HEAT 8.3 means customers already using the FrontRange HEAT product line can extend their current functionality by adding the new ITIL-based ITSM modules with no change to their current environments.

HEAT 8.3 is available to current users and new customers immediately.

<http://www.frontrange.com>



### Colligo Introduces Upgrade To Enable Instant Network Creation Anywhere

Colligo Networks, Inc., a developer of “instant networking” software, has launched Colligo Workgroup Edition 4.0 to build on the core feature set of Workgroup Edition 3.3. The flagship product is aimed at solving nomadic workgroup inefficiencies by enabling mobile teams working in any location to connect Windows-based laptops, tablet PCs and pocket PCs via server-free, peer-to-peer wireless networks and then share data and communicate electronically.

Colligo Workgroup Edition enables users to create instant networks in any location using standard WiFi hardware already installed in most of today’s laptops, tablet PCs and handhelds. The software then automatically discovers and sets up a secure connection with other authorized Colligo users on the local network.

Team members can share files using Windows applications; can communicate electronically via ink-enabled instant messaging or white-boarding; can arrange meetings via Outlook calendar; can exchange vcards; and can utilize shared resources, such as printers and Internet connections.

<http://www.colligo.com>

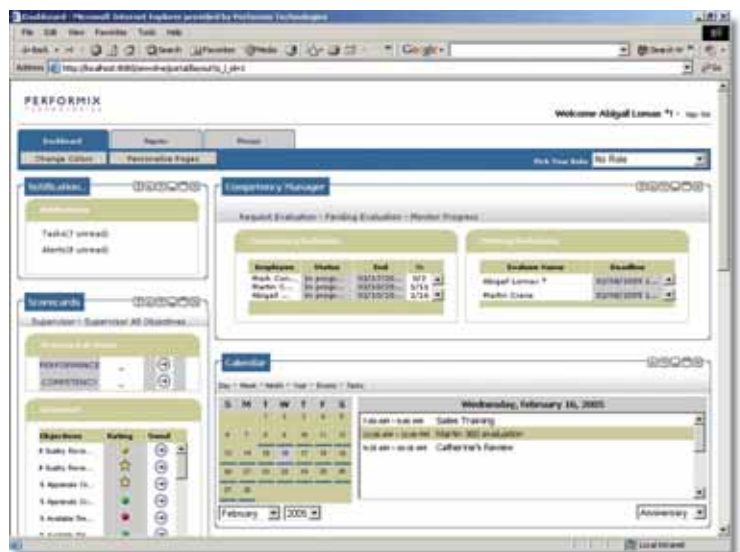
### Performix Introduces Performance Management Portal

Performix Technologies Corporation has introduced Performix PMP (Performance Management Portal). Performix PMP offers secure, centralized access to individual employee performance data and analysis, and provides tools and methodologies to standardize and execute employee performance management best practices. Performix PMP can align key performance indicators with corporate goals and can facilitate results-driven employee training, development, competency assessment and review. Also, managers and management processes are evaluated and measured by their impact on performance improvement.

“Fancy reports and dashboards don’t drive performance; they simply provide a medium to measure what has already happened in the past,” Performix CEO Bill Mahoney said. “Performix PMP does offer comprehensive data aggregation and reporting, but at the same time it provides a complete framework, which codifies and enacts your organization’s management methodologies and best practices to develop, enhance and manage employee performance on an ongoing, dynamic basis.”

Performix PMP utilizes open, J2EE-compliant standards, nonproprietary tools and database platforms for scalability and easier integration with other enterprise applications. Performix PMP takes advantage of the full suite of Performix employee performance management applications that have been deployed by the contact/service center operations at numerous financial, utility, media and telecommunications companies in North America and Europe.

<http://www.performixtechnologies.com>



**Kinetix Wireless Unveils v1.8 Of MBLink IRM Console For Mobile Workforce**

**Kinetix Wireless**, an enterprise mobile infrastructure vendor, has unveiled its 1.8 release for MBLink IRM console. Offering new features, release 1.8 is the cornerstone of the upcoming MBLink platform 2.0, a next-generation of integrated software components that are designed to enable mobile applications.

Release 1.8 allows a given mobile workforce management system to support multiple sequential auto-assignment rule streams and auto-assign orders based on adjacent and secondary dispatch areas. This is intended to ensure that the closest available worker is dispatched.

MBLink IRM is designed to provide an optimal platform for the deployment of mobile applications. Driven by an open architecture, it allows for seamless interoperability between back-end heterogeneous systems and processes. The enhanced framework is designed to reduce technical complexities of applications and to increase flexibility, while improving the ability for an organization to quickly deploy interoperable mobile applications.

Version 1.8 will allow customers to make use of alternate assignment algorithms to accommodate differing business situations that may arise. There will be two alternate assignment algorithms available as part of the standard offering in addition to the existing primary assignment rule: adjacent dispatch area support and secondary dispatch coverage.

Version 1.8 will introduce the MBLink Process Server, which is designed to provide an optimized environment for the implementation of automated assignment and dispatch processes, thus to provide customers and partners with the ability to dynamically configure and extend the version 1.8 processes.

<http://www.kinetix-wireless.com>



**Synchronica Announces Push Extension To SyncML Gateway**

**Synchronica**, a provider of SyncML synchronization and device management solutions for mobile operators, has announced it has extended its SyncML Gateway with SyncML PUSH support, instantly delivering new e-mail and changed calendar items to the user's mobile phone.

Based on the open industry standard SyncML defined by the Open Mobile Alliance (OMA), the Synchronica SyncML Gateway can work with any SyncML-enabled mobile phone. Designed to meet the standards of mobile operators, the Synchronica SyncML Gateway offers carrier-grade scalability and high availability running on industry-strength J2EE application servers.

The Synchronica SyncML Gateway does not require any software installation at the corporate level, and it works without additional client software in the device; users simply register at a central Web site and instantly receive new PIM and e-mail messages delivered to their phones. Push notifications are sent to the device using standard WAP or IP Push messages compatible with the built-in SyncML clients of standard mobile phones.

Currently, more than 150 devices from significant vendors are shipping with built-in SyncML clients.

<http://www.synchronica.com>

### EADS TELECOM Offers Integrated Audio/Web Conferencing System

**EADS TELECOM**, a provider of enterprise telephony solutions, has introduced Integrated Conference Manager (ICM), a secure, integrated audio and Web conferencing system that can help enterprises improve business processes and communications while significantly reducing the cost of conferencing.

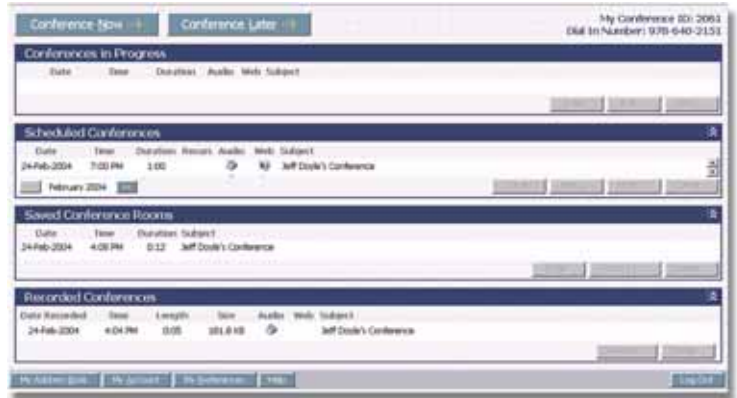
ICM can offer several advantages over service-based Web conferencing solutions, including the following: in-house control and security; reduced costs; accessibility from any device, including wireless; improved communications; and voice/data integration.

There are no recurring Web license fees or per-minute audio charges because ICM is installed in an enterprise's network. There are little or no network integration costs, and there are no charges for new users because a single system serves the entire network. Also, there is no penalty for cancellation of a conference.

"ICM can be accessed with any IP-enabled device used on your network, improving collaboration, reducing travel costs and enhancing business productivity," Ron Kopecki, executive vice president of EADS TELECOM, said.

ICM offers numerous features in the application, offering integration with Microsoft Outlook and Lotus Notes for scheduling and managing audio and Web conferences. ICM can also be used to call other parties and add them to an ongoing conference in real-time. Documents can be easily shared with ICM.

<http://www.eadstelecom-na.com>



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**APEX Announces New Conferencing Module For Multiple-Services Platform**

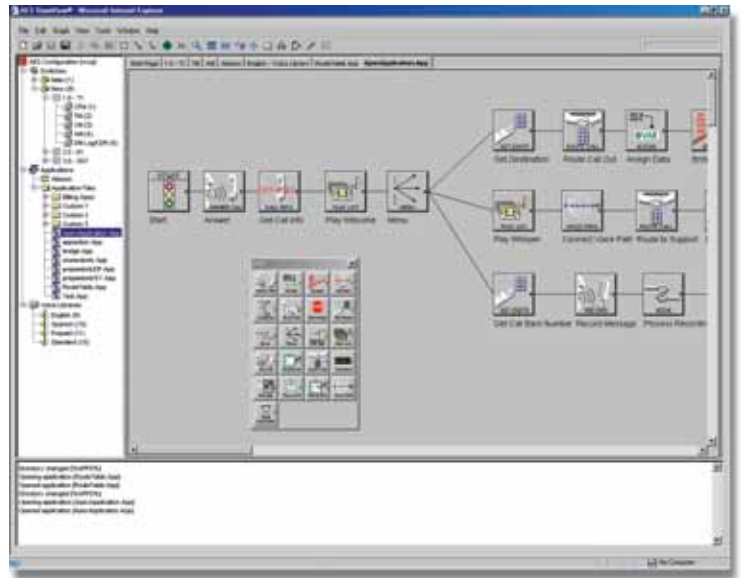
**APEX Voice Communications**, a supplier of multiple-services platforms for enhanced services and real-time billing solutions, has announced the addition of Business/Multiparty Conferencing to OmniVox AES, its latest multiservices platform for enhanced services.

The Conferencing Module supports both packet- and circuit-based networks, and the Web-based reservation system allows for conference hosts to create conferences from anywhere in the world via the Web. Key features include the following: a Web-based reservation system; support for resource and time management; and a new group of conferencing-specific command icons.

APEX's new module supports resource management and time management for better control of conferences, and it can be programmed to control the call-in time of the conference. Additionally, the module can be programmed to enforce a conference ending time in accordance with what was entered in the reservation system by the host; otherwise, the module can simply inform the participants that their time is up, without terminating the conference. For larger conferences wherein not every participant is required or invited to speak, a conference may be set for some participants to enter in a listen-only mode.

Because conferencing functionalities can be applied to different types of applications, a new group of command icons have been developed for use outside the Conferencing Module. Some of these commands include playing the list of current participants' names, dropping a participant into a conference room and checking the status/validity of a conference.

<http://www.apexvoice.com>



**Smartner Upgrades Mobile E-Mail Solution**

**Smartner Information Systems Ltd.**, a desktop-mobilization solutions provider, has announced an upgrade of its Always-On Mail Enterprise Edition that enables IT managers to centrally control and maintain global user networks. The new functionality is intended to make it easier for IT departments to control a large number of users in different locations while still keeping centralized control of the mobile devices. In addition, users can access and utilize in real time all details of their corporate and personal contacts from a smartphone or connected PDA.

Smartner Always-On Mail Enterprise Edition 5.0 offers improved management control and desktop-to-mobile environment real-time access to private and corporate contact lists.

Smartner Always-On Mail is a solution that can extend the access of Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes and Internet mailboxes to mobile devices. Without any user interaction, it can provide mobile professionals with complete control over desktop functions such as e-mail, calendar and contact lists, while on the road.

The additions are included in version 5.0 of Always-On Mail Enterprise Edition, which will be available for purchase in summer 2005.

<http://www.smartner.com>

### GWJ Software Announces Helpdesk Support Solution For IBM Lotus Notes/Domino

GWJ Software has announced the availability of c.Support 2005 for IBM Lotus Notes/Domino, a complete help desk support solution built for the Lotus Notes/Domino platform and the Web. c.Support 2005 allows support organizations to coordinate, manage and track everyday support activities, as well as more complex workflows that involve several people or departments and interdependent tasks. Other features of the software include knowledge management, asset tracking and customer self-support.

c.Support 2005 includes a number of new features and functionality designed to increase efficiency in support-related activities. c.Support 2005 users can set up an unlimited number of end user desktop interfaces for different customer groups. The Mail-In Auto Help feature searches incoming customer e-mail and automatically sends proactive e-mail back with links to matching knowledge entries and FAQs. Integration with GWJ c.Asst enables a user to schedule and run asset scans on WMI-compliant systems automatically. <http://www.gwj.com>

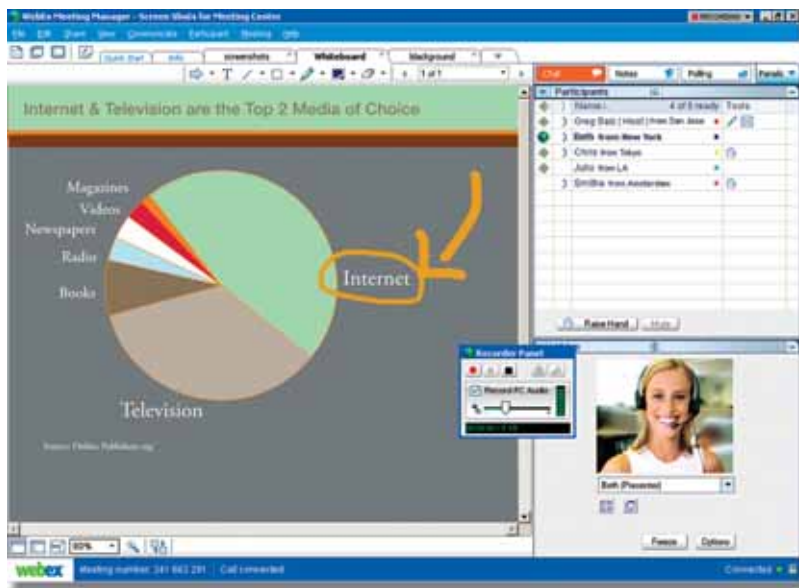
### WebEx Launches Third Generation Of MediaTone Platform

WebEx Communications, Inc., a provider of on-demand Web meeting applications, has launched the third generation of the MediaTone network platform, the underlying Web communications platform that powers all WebEx meeting applications. The enhancements to the MediaTone platform enable the WebEx suite of applications to provide a unified Web meeting experience throughout the customer lifecycle. The new MediaTone platform delivers enhancements in four key areas: simplicity, with a PowerPanel Interface; control, with an Extended MediaTone eXchange (EMX) option; telephony, with enhanced audio and flexible IP; and integration, with MediaTone APIs enterprise integration.

The latest application suite brings together all of WebEx's Web meeting applications to create a single source for customer interaction. WebEx offers a real-time collaboration suite with applications specifically designed for every stage of the customer lifecycle: Prospect with WebEx Event Center; Sell with WebEx Sales Center; Rollout with WebEx Training Center; Support with WebEx Support Center; and Coordinate with WebEx Meeting Center.

The enhanced applications are currently available at no additional cost to all WebEx customers.

<http://www.webex.com>



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### Spanlink Introduces v2.1 Of IP Communications Management Products

**Spanlink Communications**, an IP communications and contact center solution provider, has introduced version 2.1 of its CentralControl IP communications management software products. The software products are designed to simplify the administration of complex VoIP systems across many sites. Using Web services, CentralControl enables systems administrators to define groups by geography or functional role, giving supervisors of those groups the latitude to manage them within certain parameters.

"CentralControl lets central IT administrators assert integrity control over various sites without micromanaging them, enabling enterprises to make ongoing changes quickly without heavy overhead," Spanlink CEO Brett Shockley said.

CentralControl provides four critical elements for distributed IP communications management: distributed administration for secure and multilevel provisioning; automated resource allocation control; automated system configuration integrity control; and distributed information for automated report compilation and distribution.

<http://www.spanlink.com>

### Unisys Launches Open Platform For Generating Personalized Communications Services

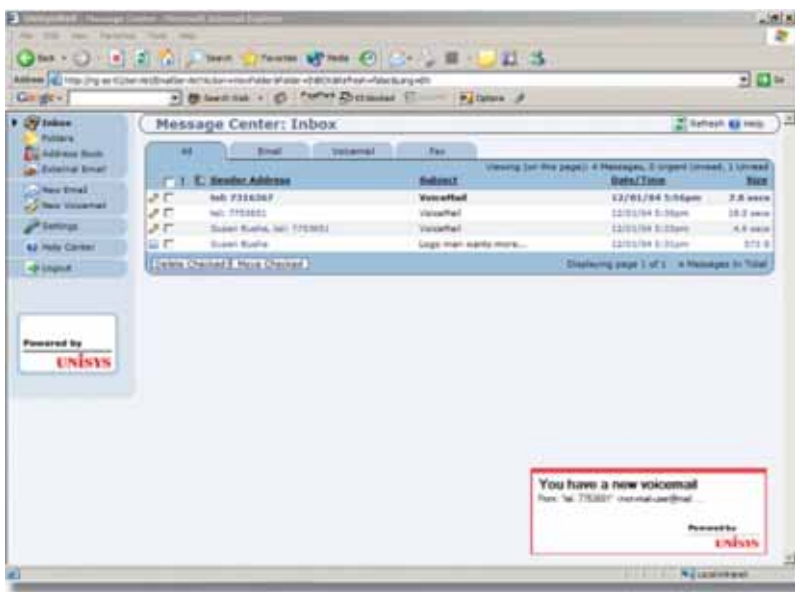
**Unisys**, a provider of messaging and value-added services, has launched an open communications platform to help service providers drive value from revenue-generating personalized services. The new platform, Ensemble OXP, is a fully open, multiservice foundation intended to provide greater flexibility to service providers who want to bundle next-generation subscriber services for various market segments while reducing total cost of ownership.

Unisys offers the entire Communications Ensemble portfolio in conjunction with Unisys systems integration capabilities, Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), third-party solution alliances, managed services, outsourcing and consulting services, including its 3D Visible Enterprise methodology.

Carriers and operators can offer a wide range of revenue-generating, IP-based messaging services on a cost-effective basis with Ensemble OXP, including the following: multimedia; notification; unified communications; network IVR; and call management services.

Specifically, Ensemble OXP includes a VXML-based unified communications application (voice/fax/e-mail); an open, unified message store; an open, unified directory server; an open, unified notification server; a standard-based media server; a commodity-application server platform; and an open services platform (OSP) integration environment.

<http://www.unisys.com>



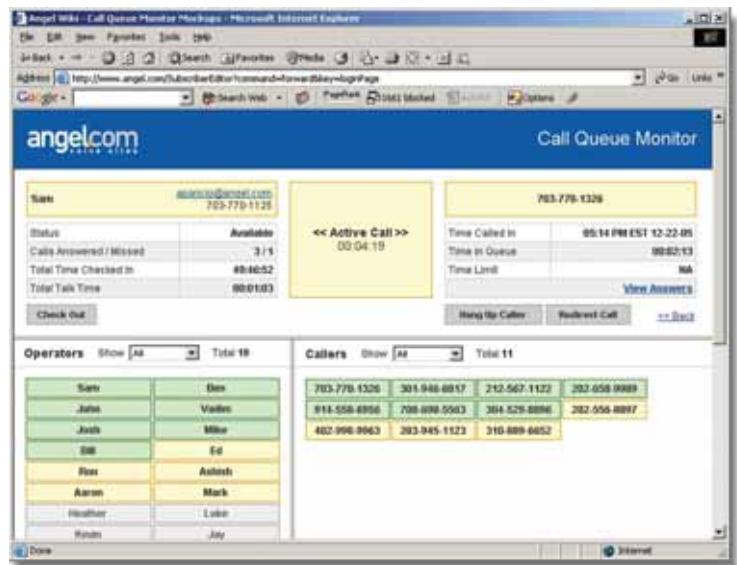
## Angel.com Announces Virtual Call Center, Combines ACD/Speech Recognition

Angel.com, a provider of Web-based, advanced telephony solutions and a division of **MicroStrategy Inc.**, has announced the launch and general availability of Virtual Call Center, a new hosted call center management solution that combines the call distribution capabilities of an ACD system with the data collection and automation power of speech recognition. These capabilities are all contained in one interface, Angel.com Site Builder 2005.

The solution is managed entirely through a Web browser to allow for rapid deployment, significant management flexibility, real-time monitoring and reporting tools and zero investment in new hardware or software.

The Angel.com hosted model, combined with Angel.com's Site Builder toolkit and speech technology, is intended to make Virtual Call Center a cost-effective alternative for enterprises considering an ACD system and related hardware and support costs. Virtual Call Center includes the following features: call routing and queuing, integrated IVR, call reporting and monitoring, and scalability and reliability.

<http://www.angel.com>  
<http://www.microstrategy.com>



## Proficient Solution To Achieve Large Business Benefits For Smaller Business

**Proficient Systems, Inc.**, a provider of enterprise software for increasing revenue and sales productivity, has announced ProficientExpress, a smaller-scaled and hosted version of the enterprise-class ProficientSales Server 4.0. The new version is intended to more affordably enable small to medium-sized businesses to achieve the same benefits previously attained by larger corporations.

ProficientExpress is equipped with a number of new features and added functionality:

Multiple-engagement allows customer service or sales agents to enter into several customer engagements at one time, maximizing productivity by eliminating the need to wait for a customer issue to be resolved before approaching the next customer in queue.

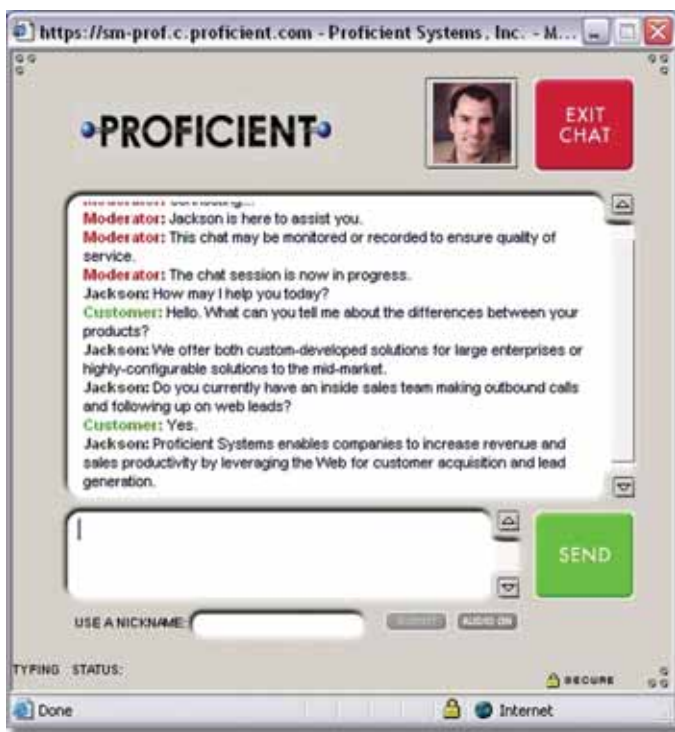
Live chat enables agents to approach a customer with an offer of live assistance that can be accepted or declined. If the invitation is accepted, he or she interacts with the agent in a manner similar to instant messaging, in a private, secure one-on-one chat.

Smart tabs allow agents to see the status of each customer engagement, including whether a customer is awaiting a response from the agent and how long he or she has waited, or whether the agent is awaiting a response from the customer.

Intelliproach is a technology that continuously approaches Web site visitors, based on their behavior and attributes, and matches them with the agent most qualified to handle their inquiry.

Finally, data mining continually analyzes the behavior and attributes of every online interaction; configures a model of the customer most likely to buy; and identifies and routes customers matching the current model to the agent most qualified to make the sale.

<http://www.proficient.com>



## CRM Express Equips Business Web Sites With 24/7 Online Customer Support

**Help Desk Technology Corporation**, a developer and marketer of help desk software, has announced its Web-based subscription service, CRM Express, can now equip small businesses' Web sites with 24/7 online customer service capabilities. The company hosts the service to allow the system to be set up in minutes, requiring no software installation or long-term commitment, offering both an easier point of contact for customers and vital management and reporting to aid business operations.

CRM Express is intended to offer customers a convenient self-service portal for submitting inquiries or service requests, checking the status of pending requests and accessing answers to common questions by using an online knowledge base created with the service's tools. Questions can relate to product specifications, shipping methods, new product availability, troubleshooting procedures, and/or any other topics relevant to that particular business.

CRM Express is intended to be a low-cost solution for around-the-clock customer service; to be a means of reducing phone inquiries by enabling customers to find many of their own answers with a few clicks; and to offer management and reporting abilities that are not available with FAQs and basic e-mail communication.  
<http://www.helpstar.com>



## Telephone Systems & Software

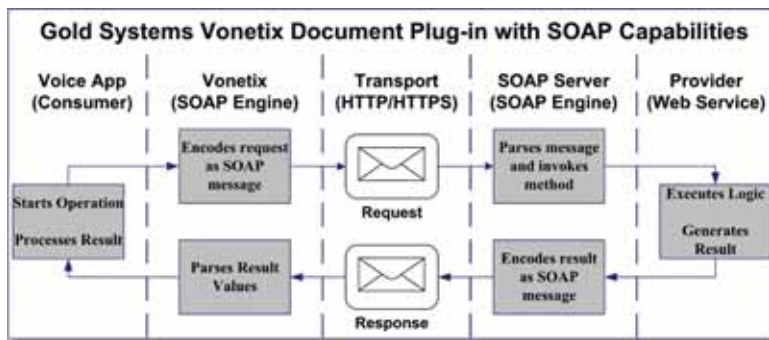
### Gold Systems Announces Vonetix Document Plug-In With SOAP Ability For Avaya

**Gold Systems**, a developer of customer-focused, voice-powered software solutions, has announced Vonetix Document Plug-in 2.1 with SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol) capability for the **Avaya** platform. Vonetix provides companies with a single infrastructure for integrating interactive voice response (IVR) applications and speech recognition technologies with existing customer communication interfaces.

Vonetix Document Plug-in 2.1 with SOAP capabilities for Avaya provides customer access to Web services via voice response, an Avaya feature exclusive to Vonetix.

Vonetix allows companies to offer both internal and external customers self-service, voice-driven access to information, transactions and services. Gold Systems combines Vonetix and voice-powered solutions to help enterprises across many industries realize results. With this plug-in, Avaya users can offer a number of Web-based services to their customers via voice.

<http://www.goldsys.com>



### Smart Telecom Launches ACD Application For Small Centers

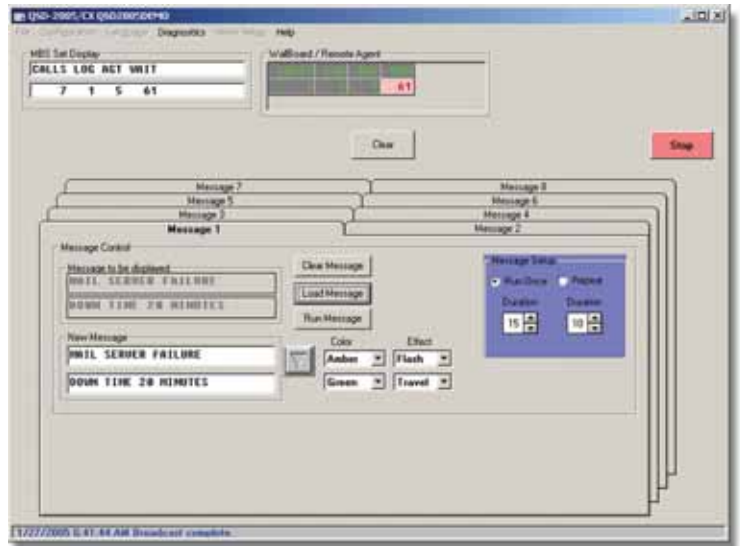
**Smart Telecom**, a developer of automation tools for contact centers and help desks, has launched a new automatic call distributor (ACD) performance reporting solution built specifically for smaller contact centers and help desks of between five and 100 agents.

QSD-2005 2.1, the latest version of Smart Telecom's flagship product, allows these centers to access real-time and historical performance management reporting, resulting in improved customer service while allowing for a more effective use of resources.

"So far, automation tools have been built for bigger centers, and the smaller centers have been under-served," Robert Koblovsky, Smart Telecom CEO, said. "Expensive upgrades and difficult and costly installations have kept these centers from achieving the optimum level in customer service and resource management. QSD-2005 2.1 gives centers with as few as five agents the ability to fulfill these objectives."

This latest version adds historical reporting and IP/VPN remote agent desktop real-time display for offsite agents. QSD-2005 2.1 is currently enabled for Nortel Centrex DMS 100 and Nortel Meridian 1. Versions for Nortel Business Communication Manager (BCM) and Nortel Symposium are currently in trials with customers. QSD-2005 2.1 is user-installable and does not require dedicated servers for the currently available platforms. It is scalable from two to eight queues and from five to over 100 seats.

<http://www.smarttelecom.ca>



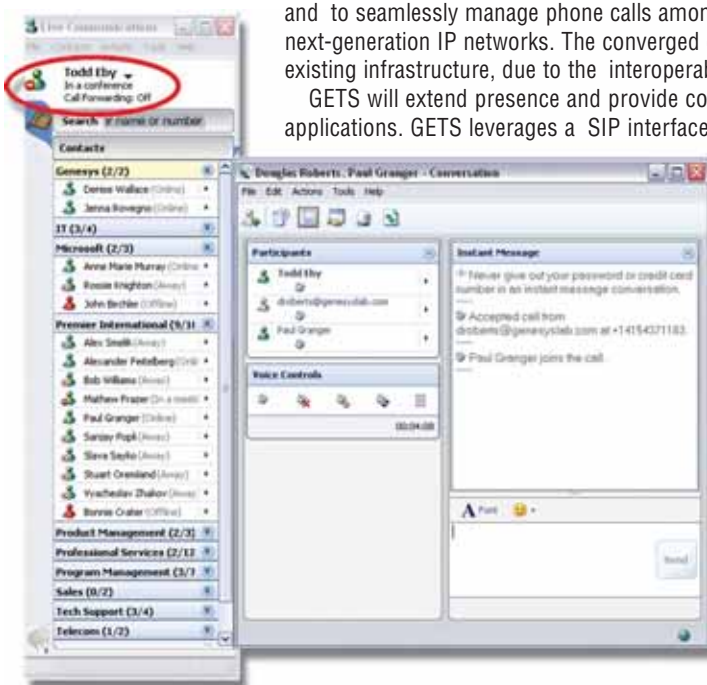
### Genesys, Microsoft Deliver Combined Solution To Fuse Instant Messaging, Telephony

**Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Inc.**, an Alcatel company, and **Microsoft Corp.** have introduced a new, combined solution to deliver converged enterprise communication services on existing and next-generation infrastructures. As part of a previously announced alliance, Genesys Enterprise Telephony Software (GETS) will interface with Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005 and Microsoft's upcoming live communications client (code-named "Istanbul") to deliver telephony collaboration for enterprise users. The combined solution will allow customers to collaborate with colleagues, to access availability and presence information, and to seamlessly manage phone calls among computers and desktop phones, using either existing PBX or next-generation IP networks. The converged communication applications can be deployed without replacing the existing infrastructure, due to the interoperability of GETS with numerous PBXs and IP telephony.

GETS will extend presence and provide control of phone calls via "Istanbul" and other Microsoft Office applications. GETS leverages a SIP interface for Live Communications Server 2005, based on the European Computer Manufacturer Association (ECMA) TR-87 industry standard, and allows business users to communicate across a multivendor PBX environment. The product, which supports more than 10,000 users, also enhances Live Communications Server 2005 and enables instant messaging users to do the following: manage presence-based call forwarding; click to dial from their PC; view telephony presence with availability information visible to users on "buddy" lists; see a caller's name and contact details on their desktop at the moment a call arrives and answer the call with a single mouse click; dynamically "grab" calls going to desk phones and allow users to answer the calls from their current location; and receive e-mail notification of missed calls, with accompanying caller contact details.

The combined collaboration solution leveraging GETS, Live Communications Server 2005 and "Istanbul" will be available in the first half of calendar year 2005.

<http://www.genesys.com>  
<http://www.microsoft.com>



## BeVocal Unveils New Voice Solution

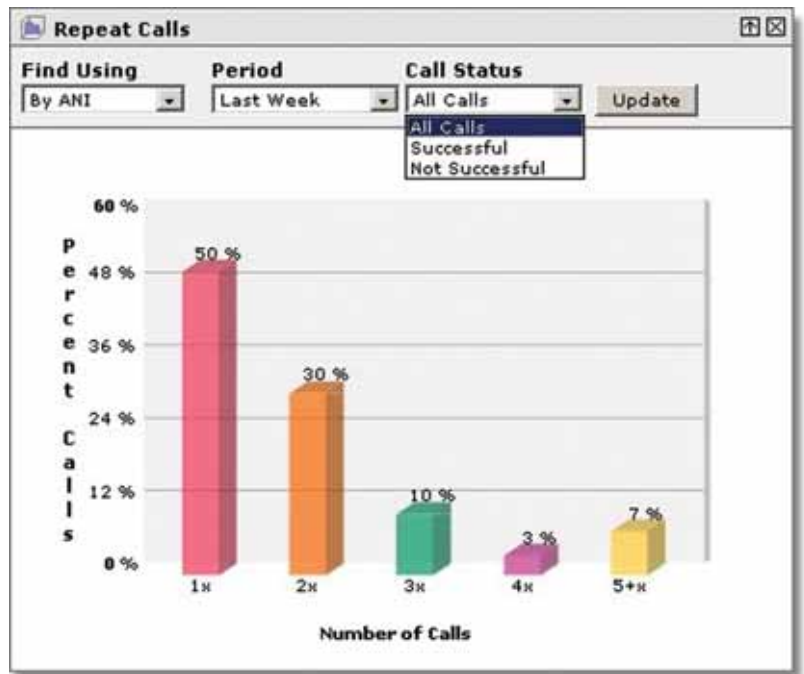
**BeVocal**, a provider of managed call automation solutions to enterprises and service providers, has unveiled The ARC Approach, a voice solution delivery model intended to ensure that clients systematically achieve their desired customer care automation and caller satisfaction results. ARC (Aligned Incentives, Results Guaranteed and Continuous Improvement) enables customers to determine key performance metrics and goals, to receive fast and frequent tuning cycles to achieve those goals, and to align pricing with results.

Whereas customer premise equipment (CPE) vendors take their fees upfront, BeVocal's fees are earned based on the system's performance after deployment.

To ensure that customer automation goals are met, BeVocal applies its "Continuous Improvement Process" to each deployment. This process has five distinct parts: high impact improvement levers; results-driven client teams; relevant KPIs and call statistics; enhanced analytical and tuning tools; and regular tune-ups.

The final component of ARC is "Results Guaranteed." BeVocal's speech and performance monitoring expertise enables the company to estimate an application's achievable automation rate, then utilize the appropriate tools and techniques to ensure clients meet their automation goals.

"This model provides for the continuous design and performance optimization of speech applications; in doing so, BeVocal's customers can dramatically improve call deflection rates and customer service without heavy upfront investment," Daniel Hong, Datamonitor voice business analyst, said. <http://www.bevocal.com>



## Apptera Introduces v-Business Solutions For The Enterprise

**Apptera** has announced the introduction of its v-Business Solutions for the worldwide enterprise market. A new voice solutions approach for delivering a personalized, tailored caller experience, v-Business combines elements of the Internet with campaign management, caller profiling and personalization techniques, to allow customer transactions to be conducted quickly and easily over the phone. Apptera's v-Business solutions are intended to help enterprises maximize their inbound phone channel to fully extract the needs and interests of callers, leveraging that knowledge to create loyalty, to ensure service excellence and to generate a profit from every customer. Apptera's v-Business Solutions are available for a range of industries, including financial services, retail and insurance markets. They are available for both on-premise and hosted deployments on a variety of IVR and speech applications.

<http://www.apptera.com>

## LumenVox Announces v5.5 Of Three Speech Tools

LumenVox has announced version 5.5 of its Speech Recognition Engine (SRE), LV Speech Tuner and Speech Driven Information System (SDIS). The latest version of the SRE offers improved performance, with the introduction of lattice-based confidence scores. LumenVox has also introduced improved barge-in and/or End-of-Speech (EOS) detection, which can detect when the caller has begun speaking, finished speaking or paused while speaking. LumenVox allows developers to custom-design their own grammars on-the-fly, filter out-of-vocabulary words and modify the engine and grammar performance at run-time. Built-in grammars handle single digits, currency, natural numbers, and date and time.

Version 5.5 of the LV Speech Tuner (LVST) is a maintenance tool that allows end users, value-added resellers and platform providers to perform tuning, transcription and testing of any speech-driven application created on multiple ASR platforms. Version 5.5 of the LVST enables speech application tuning, parameter testing, grammar testing, version upgrade testing and transcription. 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.

The latest addition to the Speech Driven Information System (SDIS) is support for a VB ActiveX exe interface. This interface can now allow developers to program their required application logic with the programming language Visual Basic. Developers can utilize common prebuilt libraries to access databases and premade integration components. This gives speech application developers the option to extend their SDIS projects with either C/C++ or Visual Basic.

<http://www.lumenvox.com>

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[cispress@tmcnet.com](mailto:cispress@tmcnet.com).

Whenever possible, please include high-resolution  
(minimum 266 dpi) color graphics (.BMP, .EPS, .TIF, or .JPG).

## Edify Announces Speech Application For Consumer Electronics Centers

Edify Corporation has announced a new speech application for the consumer electronics industry that uses natural language speech rather than repetitive touch-tone-based menus. Consumer electronics companies often have high call center costs due to the investment in trained product and technical specialists who need to answer questions about dozens, if not hundreds, of products.

Built on the Edifys Voice Interaction Platform (EVIP), the solution is intended to drive down operation costs for businesses while increasing customer satisfaction by lowering call times by more than 50 percent.

With Edify's CE Application, companies can automate the routing of calls through product and problem identification; can collect name and address information; can determine warranty status; and can process credit cards — all without a live agent.

Edify's CE Application is intended to take minutes off each phone call through an automated self-service speech application.

The completely supported application has 12 modules, comes with a built-in persona, can be quickly deployed, and can provide ROI in months.

<http://www.edify.com>

### Verint Announces ULTRA Analytics To Optimize Customer-Focused Operations

Verint Systems Inc., a provider of analytic software-based solutions for communications interception, networked video security and business intelligence, has announced a new analytics suite, ULTRA Analytics, for its ULTRA solution. ULTRA Analytics, powered by Verint's IntelliFind and IntelliMiner solutions, combines sophisticated voice and data analysis to help enterprises identify, understand and resolve issues that impact the effectiveness of their customer-focused operations. ULTRA Analytics enables businesses to understand not only what is happening in their operations, but to also identify the underlying causes. ULTRA Analytics provides actionable intelligence on such critical issues as to why agents are underperforming, why customers are dissatisfied or why enterprise processes are ineffective.

Verint's ULTRA solution and Analytics suite help drive quality by enabling organizations of all sizes to more cost-effectively capture all customer interactions and extract actionable intelligence from telephone, VoIP, e-mail or chat. Easy access to all customer data through ULTRA's Web-based desktop portal enables enterprises to use what they learn from customer contacts to optimize their processes, increase productivity, comply with risk management requirements and improve service to their customers.

<http://www.verint.com>

### Outbound

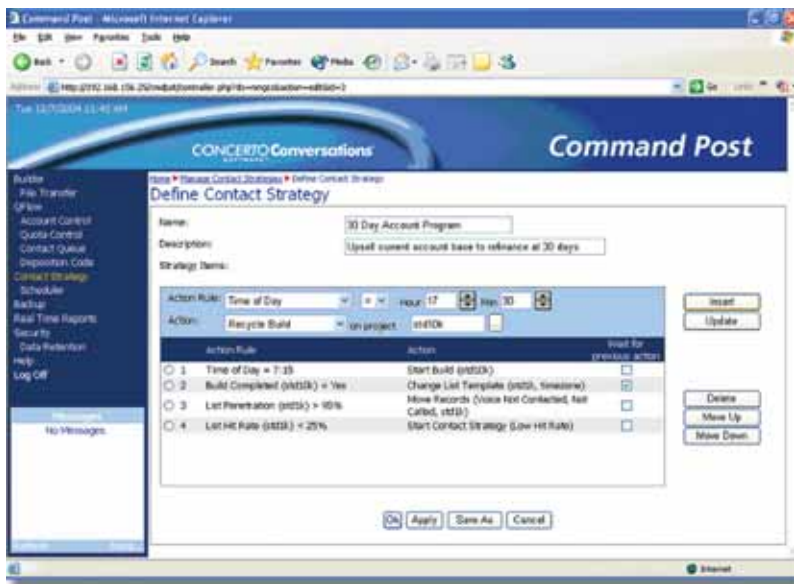
### Concerto Announces Availability Of Two Enterprise Suite Components

Concerto Software, a provider of contact center solutions, has announced that FirstPoint Enterprise 10.0 and Conversations 6.0, two key components of the Concerto Enterprise Suite, became generally available in December 2004. Designed for companies looking to replace or add incremental functionality to an existing contact center, the Concerto Enterprise Suite offers a "take-from-the-box" approach that allows organizations to select the components that best fit their strategic customer contact requirements.

FirstPoint Enterprise 10.0, the first component, incorporates 1,200 new "discrete" features and provides customers with capabilities for improving customer service by tracking an individual's complete contact history. The product now also provides systemwide monitoring to manage components across single or multisite FirstPoint Enterprise environments and cradle-to-grave reporting capabilities for multiple contact center sites.

Conversations 6.0, an outbound campaign and agent management tool, incorporates numerous features and includes system architecture changes designed to offer increased flexibility and reliability. This release enables extended real-time upload methodologies, enhances record management based on a standardized object-oriented structure, and removes dependence on a specific hardware platform. Users with multinational operations also can now benefit from internationalized callback date/time formats and agent/supervisor language preference setting features. Conversations 6.0 now also offers campaign quota management and reduced nuisance rates features.

<http://www.concerto.com>



### Teleservices Firm Raises Money For SE Asia Tsunami Victims

**Synergy Solutions**, an inbound and outbound teleservices firm located in Phoenix, within a few days after the disaster launched an aggressive fund raising campaign within the company for victims of the tsunami in Southeast Asia. The team called on everyone from the top down.

"We agreed that the company would match dollar for dollar all donations made by our employees nationwide," Synergy President Lori Fentem said.

Between December 30 and January 14, the employees and the company raised over \$5,500, which was donated to MercyCorps and Doctors Without Borders, both charities with a strong presence where the tsunami hit hardest.

The Synovation team at Synergy Solutions consists of 11 volunteer representatives from every area of the company: operations, account management, IT, accounting and sales. The team's mission is to foster the company's "Synovation Culture" by developing community service projects and volunteer opportunities, as well as building team spirit and camaraderie within the company.

<http://www.synergysolutionsinc.com>

### LiveTime Service Desk Applications Now Available For Novell NetWare 6.5

LiveTime Software, developer of J2EE Service Desk applications, has announced that LiveTime Support and LiveTime Help Desk have been Novell "YES CERTIFIED" on Novell NetWare 6.5. NetWare users will now be able to deploy and run the scalable Web-based applications previously only available to customers running Linux/Solaris/MacOS and Windows operating systems.

<http://www.livetime.com>

<http://www.novell.com>

### Witness Systems Completes Acquisition Of Blue Pumpkin

**Witness Systems**, a provider of performance optimization software and services, has announced the completion of its acquisition of **Blue Pumpkin Software, Inc.**, a provider of enterprise workforce management solutions. The total purchase price of approximately \$75 million consisted of \$40 million in cash and 2.1 million shares of Witness Systems' common stock. Solutions from the combined company are intended to offer customers a broader contact center performance optimization capability to include advanced workforce management software. The acquisition expands Witness Systems' software and services by adding forecasting, scheduling, adherence and planning applications. Blue Pumpkin's solutions are intended to extend the breadth and depth of Witness Systems' services offering in workforce optimization.

A key asset and attraction of Blue Pumpkin, it seems, was its employees. As part of employment offers to join the company, Witness Systems' Board of Director Compensation Committee has approved an award of options to acquire up to 800,000 shares of common stock. These options will be awarded to approximately 120 Blue Pumpkin employees. The stock option awards will be made "as promptly as possible following the closing," subject to those employees' commencement of employment.

<http://www.witness.com>

### Quaero, BSCol Partner For Customer Management Strategy Development And Execution

**Quaero**, a provider of customer marketing solutions, has announced a joint marketing and service agreement with **Balanced Scorecard Collaborative (BSCol)**, a provider of corporate strategy and development.

The two companies' joining is based on a mutual belief that "customer management is a critical challenge for organizations." The two companies also share the view that "achieving breakthrough success requires activities ranging from executive leadership and alignment, to the development of the critical organizational and technological capabilities required to support the transformation."

<http://www.quaero.com>

<http://www.bscol.com>

### VenturCom Changes Name, Relocates Global Headquarters

**VenturCom**, a designer and developer of software solutions that enhance the control, dependability and management of Windows operating systems, has announced it has changed the company name to **Ardence** and will market its flagship software-streaming solutions under the Ardence brand name. The name change and rebranding coincided with the opening of the company's new global headquarters in Waltham, MA, a relocation that is intended to accommodate the steady growth fueled by Ardence, a suite of software-streaming solutions that are being deployed in enterprise environments worldwide.

<http://www.vci.com>

### VoiceLog Offers Seven Years' Of Free Recorder Storage

**VoiceLog LLC**, a provider of on-demand call recording and monitoring, has announced that all VirtualLogger clients will receive seven years' of free RecordingWarehouse service. RecordingWarehouse from VoiceLog provides secure, extended online, near-line and offline storage for audio and video records for any recorder. Using the multiterabyte, 99.999 percent uptime VoiceLog platform, RecordingWarehouse can provide online or archive storage for many years in a fortified bunker.

Under the new program, VirtualLogger clients will continue to receive free online storage for up to three months and continued offline storage for seven years. The new long-term storage service is a value-added service offered at no additional cost as part of the overall VirtualLogger package.

<http://www.voicelog.com>

### EADS Adds NexWave, Connect-tek To Certified Partner Program

**EADS TELECOM**, a provider of IP telephony and contact center solutions, has announced that **NexWave Technologies**, a provider of IP telephony, networking and contact center solutions, is the newest company to join its Certified Partner program.

Partnering with NexWave Technologies can help to strengthen EADS' channel as it enters the Oklahoma and Midwest markets, reaching more than 200 new customer prospects. As a value-added reseller for EADS, NexWave Technologies will offer Nexspan, the company's sixth-generation VoIP solution, Unified Communication Platform and Centergy M7480 contact center solutions.

EADS also announced that **Connect-tek**, a provider of business communications technology, has also joined the EADS Certified Partner Program.

This addition to EADS' channel further expands its presence in the marketplace, with Connect-tek customers in the Pennsylvania area. As a value-added reseller for EADS, Connect-tek will offer the company's sixth-generation VoIP solution (Nexspan), Unified Communication Platform and Centergy Contact Center solutions to address the needs of small to medium-sized enterprises delivering traditional PBX, converged systems or full VoIP capability.

<http://www.eadstelecom-na.com>

<http://www.nexwavetechnologies.com>

<http://www.goconnect.com>

### Cincom, VentureForward Form Knowledge Partnership

**Cincom Systems, Inc.**, a data access and integration/process automation/manufacturing solutions provider, and **VentureForward, LLC**, a knowledge management/engineering systems provider, have formed a partnership to combine Cincom's enterprise knowledge-based development system with VentureForward's domain expertise in knowledge gathering. The intended result is to "fill a critical void for Fortune 500 companies in getting know-how out of experts and into useable systems," by finding, keeping and using knowledge present but difficult to locate within organizations. Distinct from earlier expert systems that mined old data, this new partnership leverages Cincom's expert engines and VentureForward's processes to acquire and download new expertise in a manageable way. The Cincom-VentureForward partnership solution will aggregate, stabilize and make more readily available this critical organizational knowledge and expertise.

<http://www.cincom.com>

<http://www.wow2now.com>

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### Oracle, Convergys Announce Joint Solution For Genesis

**Oracle**, an enterprise software provider, and **Convergys**, an integrated billing, employee care and customer care services provider, have announced they are supplying an advanced business support systems solution to Genesis Communications, an independent business mobile service provider.

The solution comprises Oracle's E-Business Suite and the Infinys software from Convergys. Oracle and Convergys worked closely to streamline the integration of E-Business Suite and Convergys' Infinys application for rating and billing. The solution enables **Genesis Communications** to build on its customer-focused strategy and to broaden its product portfolio to include more value-added services.

The joint Oracle and Convergys solution automates key processes, such as order management and fulfillment, delivers sophisticated rating and billing, provides a single customer view across all accounts and supports a multilanguage/multicurrency operation. Such capabilities deliver full support for Genesis Communications' mobile communications operation across the UK.

In addition, the solution is designed to transform back-office and front-office processes by automating previously manual activities, such as order management and fulfillment, resulting in reduced overall transaction costs.

Sales and marketing are also enhanced through the convergent capabilities and flexibility of Infinys. The solution provides a single customer view across all accounts with flexible rating and discounting, as well as the ability to differentiate services and bring them to market quickly.

<http://www.oracle.com> <http://www.convergys.com>

<http://www.genesis-communications.co.uk>

### Nuance, Angel.com Team To Deliver Voice Automation To SMBs

**Nuance**, a provider of voice automation solutions, and **Angel.com**, a provider of Web-based, advanced telephony solutions, have announced a strategic relationship to bring voice automation solutions to the small to medium-sized business (SMB) market. This alliance is intended to address a problem the SMB marketplace faces: how to provide superior customer service with minimal costs.

Angel.com's offering is intended to enable companies to quickly deploy low-risk voice automation solutions to deliver numerous benefits provided by large, custom voice applications, at a much lower cost. Angel.com's Web-based tools and pay-per-use pricing model, combined with Nuance's voice technologies and platform, is aimed to make these solutions accessible to businesses of all sizes.

As part of the alliance, Angel.com's on-demand, self-service speech solutions will be made available on the Nuance Voice Platform. The Nuance Voice Platform supports VoiceXML 2.0. Angel.com's solutions will also leverage Nuance's text-to-speech engine, Nuance Vocalizer, which converts text in a database into spoken words.

<http://www.nuance.com>

<http://www.angel.com>

**Loquendo, Oration Sign VAR Agreement**

**Loquendo**, a global speech technology company, has announced it has entered into an agreement with **Oration SA**, a Greek speech solutions provider, establishing the latter as a value added reseller for Loquendo's telephony and multimedia Text To Speech and Automatic Speech Recognition products in Europe.

Through this agreement, Oration will be offering its next-generation IVR solutions. Further, Loquendo hopes its multimedia Text To Speech will open new markets for the company through the provision of applications of such type for the disabled, museums, information kiosks, etc.

<http://www.loquendo.com>

<http://www.oration.gr>

**Edify Voice Banking Receives Microsoft SALT Verification**

**Edify Corporation**, a voice and speech software provider, has announced that its Edify Voice Banking application received formal SALT certification from **Microsoft Corporation**. The application is a comprehensive, packaged speech solution.

A Microsoft Speech Partner for the past year, Edify is the first member to receive formal certification for a financial services packaged application. The Edify Voice Banking Application on SALT will be available in the second quarter timeframe.

<http://www.edify.com>

**Comdial, Tech Data U.S. Establish Distribution Agreement**

**Comdial Corporation**, a provider of communications solutions for small and mid-sized enterprises, and **Tech Data Corporation**, a provider of IT products, logistics management and other value-added services, have announced their establishment of a product distribution agreement. The Agreement will expand Comdial's distribution and will extend Tech Data's telephony products offering, allowing both companies to capitalize on growth opportunities in the IP telephony market.

Comdial products offered through the new agreement with Tech Data are intended to meet a variety of business requirements: Comdial's CONVERSIP MP1000 Media Platform is designed exclusively for small and mid-sized enterprise VoIP deployments.

Through its Telephony Specialized Business Unit (SBU), Tech Data began distributing the MP1000 and other Comdial products to U.S. resellers last month. The SBU is focused on supporting the needs of value-added resellers targeting the telephony market.

<http://www.comdial.com>

<http://www.techdata.com>

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# CRM For The SMB Market:

## Five Considerations For Making A Smart Decision

Formerly reserved for the largest of enterprises, CRM has become a practical solution for small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) looking to boost sales and optimize performance by really managing — and improving — the entire customer relationship.

Scanning recent trade magazine articles will show that vendors have realized that SMBs represent an under-tapped market and are targeting offerings to meet the specific needs of this segment. To do so, they are lowering prices and, therefore, making solutions more affordable for these companies. Vendors also have paid attention to SMB pain points, building applications that offer more functionality as well as easier configuration and use. As a result, market forecasts indicate smaller companies are responding positively to these changes and are expected to increase their CRM spending in the year ahead.

The issue for SMBs, then, is no longer whether or not CRM is viable. Rather, it has become, “How do I find a cost-effective solution to match my business requirements?” The first step in a successful implementation that delivers on its promised benefits is understanding the different types of products and what they offer in the way of meeting the particular needs of SMBs.

### Different Technologies For Different Requirements

Despite a growing number of products, there are really only three categories of offerings: client/server applications, self-hosted online applications and vendor-hosted online applications.

The traditional client/server application is installed on the company’s server on-site, giving the company complete data control. With its rich, Windows-based interface, this type of product is familiar to users and requires little in the way of training to get them up to speed. This type of application may also offer more complex modules, such as call center management, to meet highly specialized requirements.

The client/server model has disadvantages, however. It doesn’t allow remote staff to access information from any environment. Instead, it requires users to work from a desktop PC or a laptop and to synchronize information with the corporate database. It can also be an expensive choice, requiring hardware upgrades or purchases, as well as a hefty software investment. Finally, the client/server tool requires specialized IT expertise for administration and maintenance — which can translate to a disadvantage for organizations with limited IT staff and budgets.

Online applications, as the name implies, are Web-based, so the database can be accessed and updated anytime and anywhere via an Internet connection. Distinct advantages of online applications for SMBs are simplified

deployment and management across the enterprise, as well as ease-of-use for personnel. The initial cost is also lower, as the company can leverage its existing equipment to get up and running.

The two types of online solutions, self-hosted and vendor-hosted, are named based on the location of the database — which is where purchasers will find some significant differences.

In the self-hosted scenario, the database resides securely on the company’s server, giving the company both ownership and control of its corporate intelligence. This means the company can ensure information security and can use the database as it sees fit without incurring vendor charges. Highly flexible, the self-hosted online application is also easy to customize, and its affordable, one-time software cost is a plus for companies with limited budgets.

With the vendor-hosted option, a company can experience the same anytime-and-anywhere Internet access, but at a higher cost in terms of price and data ownership. The software investment is generally more expensive because there are monthly “rental” or hosting fees to pay. And because the vendor hosts the database, the information resides within its facility, not the company’s. Changes, updates and customization are handled — sometimes at a charge — by the vendor’s staff.

By Ed Dempsey  
WiredContact Worldwide, Inc.



### Five Strategic Considerations

Because of the advantages they offer SMBs, online CRM applications are emerging as real contenders for those looking to attain — and make the most of — a complete, integrated view of the customer relationship. Before making a decision, however, companies need to take a close look at their requirements and compare them against what a product offers. There are five essential areas for consideration:

- Productivity;
- Simplicity;
- Affordability;
- Functionality; and
- Manageability.

#### Productivity

One of the main goals of CRM technology is to help sales, service and other customer-facing employees work faster and smarter. Some applications with many bells and whistles are complex to learn and utilize and can actually impede productivity. Other CRM applications, however, offer powerful capabilities yet are easy to become skilled at and use, making them appropriate tools for midmarket companies with limited IT support in-house. There are several features to consider:

- **Essential sales functionality.** Basic contact, lead, sales and calendar management features should be complete yet uncomplicated, helping salespeople do their jobs more efficiently.
- **Flexibility.** The ability to easily tailor the product to the organization's needs and best practices is mandatory to ensure that everyone can use the tool to full potential. Additionally, the product's adaptability allows it to grow and change along with the company.
- **Real-time information.** When everyone in an organization can easily enter information anytime and from anywhere, they can work together more effectively. They'll know their data are accurate, complete and up-to-date for better decision making.
- **Automatic updating** If information can be updated seamlessly throughout

the database and readily available to everyone, a company eliminates administration hassles, reduces time demands on employees and avoids system downtime.

#### Simplicity

With limited IT personnel and resources, SMBs require a solution that can be used without requiring specialized technical knowledge or extensive training. Some online solutions meet this challenge with the following capabilities:

- **Point-and-click operation.** Simple mouse-click operation of all features reduces the learning curve and encourages sales and business professionals to leverage the full capabilities of the system.
- **A Web-based browser.** This makes the online product an SMB-friendly choice. Even users who aren't technically proficient, or who are accustomed to another type of CRM product, can access the Internet with ease. The simplified navigation of the Web-based browser promotes usage across the enterprise.
- **A clean, user-friendly interface.** Above all else, this makes it easy for sales and other business professionals to move around comfortably within the product and to take advantage of its capabilities.
- **Customization.** If the product can be customized using standard HTML language to accommodate company-specific fields or views, for instance, it eliminates the need for specialized IT expertise or consulting fees.

#### Affordability

Although CRM prices have dropped, cost is still a factor, varying by type of product:

- **Client/server application.** This type tends to be more expensive than either vendor- or self-hosted online solutions. Typical start-up costs for software and implementation for an installation of 25 users are about \$2,400 to \$5,400 per user. Additionally, monthly maintenance and support fees, as well as expenses for

upgrading user and server hardware, increase the bill.

- **Vendor-hosted online application.** With this model, customers can expect to pay approximately \$780 to \$1,500 per user, per year in software costs.
- **Self-hosted online application.** The self-hosted online solution generally comes with a one-time charge of about \$300 per user. If the company requires the services of a consultant for implementation, training and basic customization help, it can add a one-time \$5,000 cost to the bill to avoid paying monthly fees to a hosting vendor.

#### Functionality

Certain features are a must for the SMB looking to automate its sales force. All three product types offer basic levels of customer management, although with varying degrees of simplicity, utility and effectiveness. As part of its purchase considerations, a company should look for the following:

- **Contact, lead and customer management.** These capabilities help sales professionals optimize their performance, providing them with the means to do things such as track scheduled and completed activities; analyze leads; locate cross-selling opportunities; manage sales pipelines; manage daily, weekly and monthly calendars; and collaborate on documents.
- **Reporting.** The ability to quickly and efficiently produce different types of reports is valuable. Some offerings have multiple report selects, so users can create stock or customized documents as needed. Some provide management with the ability to access reports for sales analysis and forecasting — again, with a simple click of the mouse.
- **Integrated communications.** Some tools make it easy to correspond more effectively while maintaining the company's brand and messaging, whether using e-mail or print messages. Other useful communications capabilities include mail-merge templates, which allow users to personalize mass mailing messages, or tabs that allow them to

The issue for SMBs, then, is no longer whether or not CRM is viable. Rather, it has become, "How do I find a cost-effective solution to match my business requirements?"

pre-assign attachments to a broadcast e-mail with a mouse-click.

- **Record retrieval.** A product with user-friendly scopes and filters allows salespeople to immediately find the contacts for which they're looking. They can drill down and target contacts for phone calls, reporting and marketing campaigns.

- **Lead capture.** This capability both saves time and increases information integrity and usefulness by automatically gathering Web site visitor information and integrating it into the database.

- **Centralized database.** An organization gains peace of mind when it captures its data in a single database on-site. The company — not the hosting vendor — controls the security and use of its own information. And because the data do not reside on local hard drives or PDAs, the organization holds on to valuable information, even if employees leave their positions.

- **External database integration.** Tight integration with business-critical databases, such as inventory control or accounting systems, enhances productivity across the enterprise without the need for IT experts on staff. It also provides a more complete overview of the entire customer relationship.

### Manageability

Convenience should be the operative word when it comes to a CRM solution for SMBs. From a technical standpoint, it makes sense to find a product that allows sales personnel to handle routine tasks. From a business perspective, the product should assist sales management in doing its job more efficiently. Among the considerations:

- **Technical administration.** Easy administration is a huge advantage.

Some online solutions require only a Web browser to get started. There is no need for hardware upgrades or replacements, and no need for IT staff to handle these tasks. Some also synchronize data throughout the system automatically, eliminating the call for technical intervention to update information.

- **Flexible layouts.** When salespeople and businesspeople can easily change the look, feel and workflow on the desktop to suit their personal preferences or the company's sales process, they have a solution they're more likely to actually use.

- **Sales analysis.** Some CRM products allow management to analyze sales effectiveness and to measure performance based on quantifiable metrics. Some allow users to report on all open sales opportunities within a particular territory and to view them by different parameters: by user, expected close date, probability of closing or sales stage.

- **Territory management.** When sales management can define who sees what based on criteria such as team, group, record owner or record values, there's no need to slog through large databases to find specific data. This feature also allows salespeople to know that their proprietary data will be kept private.

- **Field-level security.** With this capability, sales management can give permission to see or edit fields on a user-by-user basis, enabling enterprisewide access to general information while restricting access to more sensitive data.

These five considerations, while certainly not the only deciding factors in the purchase decision, are valuable to keep in mind. Using them as guidelines, SMBs can select a CRM solution to help them realize the benefits of the technology as well as a return on their investment. **CIS**

*Ed Dempsey is president and CEO of WiredContact Worldwide, Inc. (<http://www.wiredcontact.com>), a provider of Web-based software tools designed to meet the productivity challenges of sales, marketing and other business professionals.*

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# CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® Magazine's Twentieth Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking

This is the twentieth year *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine brings you its "Top 50" Teleservices Agencies Ranking. In this issue, we're presenting the "Top 50" outbound portion of the ranking. (The inbound portion of the ranking will be highlighted in the April 2005 issue.) Since its inception in 1986, our "Top 50" ranking has been used as the benchmark for choosing large-capacity/sized teleservices agencies.

## Ranking Basis

Because the basis of our ranking is company size, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* uses a measurable, third-party-verifiable aspect of teleservices to arrive at our list of the "Top 50" agencies: the number of minutes each agency was billed by each of its phone companies for telephone service for 12 months, encompassing November 2003 through October 2004. We have found this to be an accurate and reliable reflection of the amount of teleservices each agency does, and therefore, provides a true reflection of its size.

## Qualification Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in this year's "Top 50," the agencies were required to answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes between November 2003 and October 2004. The questionnaire had to be verified with the signature of each agency's president/CEO. In addition, each agency had to submit a letter of verification from each of its telephone service providers certifying the number of minutes for which it billed the agency during the designated period. (Our sincere gratitude is extended to all the carriers for their thorough and expeditious provision of these data.)

## Exceptions

Agencies that did not supply this third-party verification were disqualified, with the exception of three circumstances: 1) a client of the service agency was billed directly for its telephone service and would not provide a letter of verification for anonymity reasons; 2) part of the billable minutes were with a foreign telecommunications carrier that could not provide the data by the deadline; 3) legitimate business situations prevented an agency from obtaining verification from certain of its carriers or a certain carrier. For each of these circumstances, we allow the company to certify *a small portion* of the missing minutes with a letter of explanation and signed verification of billable minutes pertaining to the explanation from the president/CEO of the agency. **You will find an asterisk next to the names of all "Top 50" agencies that supplied a portion of their verification from their president/CEO due to one of the three circumstances identified above.**

In all cases, from the questionnaires to the letters of verification, the agencies were warned that should falsification be detected, they would be disqualified from this and all future "Top 50" rankings. And indeed, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine's editorial staff carefully verified calculations, discrepancies and other aspects of the supplied information to ensure that this ranking is of true value to you.

## Understanding The Listings

You'll notice that for the first time, we have included a ranking of aggregate minutes, inbound and outbound, domestic and international, to provide readers with a picture of how the largest teleservices providers measure against one another on a global basis. This ranking follows the domestic and international outbound lists and is marked as Category C.

Second, as you read through the list of outbound "Top 50" agencies, you will notice that we have provided a numerical ranking of 1



through 39 (1 being the largest), but have not revealed the number of billable minutes used to arrive at this ordering. This was done out of respect for the confidential nature of this information to the many agencies included here that are privately held corporations. This year, only 39 companies met with our minimum criteria of billable minutes to be included in the domestic outbound ranking.

You will notice that the outbound ranking has been divided into two categories: A and B. Category A is composed of U.S. service agencies whose primary business function is the provision of telemarketing services for outside firms. If you are considering an international teleservices campaign, Category B consists of international teleservices agencies. Again this year we have separated out all international teleservices done by U.S. agencies and ranked those companies' international minutes in the International category, Category B. Domestic companies that are also ranked in the International category are marked with a dagger (†) in their domestic ranking.

We hope you will use this "Top 50" feature, both inbound and outbound portions, for your outsourcing needs throughout the year, and be sure to tell the companies you found the information in *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*.

Companies with enhanced listing are regular advertisers in *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*. **CIS**

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**CATEGORY A**

1. Millennium Teleservices LLC †  
<http://http://www.mmtel.com>
2. DialAmerica Marketing, Inc. \*  
<http://www.dialamerica.com>
3. ICT Group, Inc. \* †  
<http://www.ictgroup.com>
4. InfoCision Management Corp.  
Ph: 330-668-1400;  
Fx: 330-668-1401  
<http://www.infocision.com>  
Year began providing teleservices: 1982  
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 500 hours  
Type of calling:  
B-to-B: 25%; B-to-C: 75%  
Outbound: 83%; Inbound: 17%;  
Interactive Inbound: 1%  
Specialization: non-profit and religious fundraising, commercial sales and customer care, volunteer recruitment
5. Americall Group Inc. (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group)  
<http://www.americallgroup.com>
6. APAC Customer Services, Inc. \* †  
<http://www.apaccustomerservices.com>
7. SITEL Corp. \* †  
<http://www.sitel.com>
8. Convergys Corp. \* †  
<http://www.convergys.com>
9. GC Services Limited Partnership \* †  
<http://www.gcserv.com>
10. ClientLogic \* †  
<http://www.clientlogic.com>
11. Access Direct  
<http://www.accdir.com>
12. Teleperformance USA (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group) \* †  
<http://www.teleperformanceusa.com>
13. TCIM Services, Inc. \* †  
<http://www.tcim.com>
14. NCO Customer Management Inc., (a division of NCO Group) \* †  
<http://www.ncogroup.com>
15. NOVO 1, Inc. (formerly Call\_Solutions) \*  
<http://www.novo1.com>
16. Influent Inc. †  
<http://www.influentinc.com>
17. ChoicePoint Precision Marketing  
<http://www.cp-pm.com>
18. Epixtar (formerly Innovative Marketing Strategies, Inc.)  
<http://www.epixtar.com>
19. Charlton  
<http://www.tcgcorp.net>
20. The Heritage Company, Inc.  
<http://www.theheritagecompany.com>
21. Technion Communications Corp. \*  
<http://www.technion.com>
22. Synergy Solutions, Inc. \*  
<http://www.callsynergy.com>
23. Teleservices Direct †  
<http://www.teleservicesdirect.com>
24. Cross Country Automotive Services, Inc.  
<http://www.crosscountry-auto.com>
25. LiveBridge, Inc. \*  
<http://www.livebridge.com>
26. OKS Ameridial \* †  
<http://www.oksameridial.com>

27. Creative Marketing Services, Inc.  
Ph: 856-384-1111; Fx: 856-853-6859  
<http://www.cmsgrp.com>  
Year began providing teleservices:  
2000  
Size of projects accepted:  
Minimum 250 hours  
Type of calling:  
B-to-B: 40%; B-to-C: 60%  
Outbound: 85%; Inbound: 15%  
Specialization: financial, telecommunications, insurance

28. Vision-X, Inc. \*  
<http://www.vxusa.com>

29. MSA Solutions  
<http://www.msasolutions.com>

30. TeleSpectrum, Inc. \* †  
<http://www.telespectrum.com>

31. Advanced Data-Comm, Inc.  
Ph: 800-582-9501;  
Fx: 800-829-9780  
<http://www.advanced-data.com>  
Year began providing teleservices:  
1988  
Size of projects accepted:  
Minimum 20 hours  
Type of calling:  
B-to-B: 71.5%; B-to-C: 28.5%  
Outbound: 48.23%; Inbound: 51.77%;  
Interactive inbound: 5.76%  
Specialization: third-party verification, sales, publishing

32. Answernet Network  
<http://www.answernetnetwork.com>

33. Merkafon International (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group) †  
<http://www.merkafon.com>

34. Greene & Associates, Inc.  
<http://www.greeneassoc.com>

35. Microdyne Outsourcing, Inc. \*  
<http://www.microdyne.com>

36. Interactive Response Technologies \*  
<http://www.callcenter.com>

37. AFFINA - The Customer Relationship Company \*  
<http://www.affina.com>

38. The Connection \*  
<http://www.the-connection.com>

39. Center Partners  
<http://www.centerpartners.com>

**CATEGORY B — INTERNATIONAL**

1. SR. Teleperformance  
<http://www.srteleperformance.com>

2. Msource Corp. \*  
<http://www.msource.net>

3. NCO Customer Management Inc., (a division of NCO Group) \*  
<http://www.ncogroup.com>

4. SITEL Corp. \*  
<http://www.sitel.com>

5. Xentel DM Inc. \*  
<http://www.xentel.com>

6. ICT Group, Inc. \*  
<http://www.ictgroup.com>

7. TeleSpectrum Worldwide \*  
<http://www.telespectrum.com>

8. ClientLogic \*  
<http://www.clientlogic.com>

9. Convergys Corp. \*  
<http://www.convergys.com>

10. eTelecare Global Solutions \*  
<http://www.etelecare.com>

11. Atesia S.p.A.  
<http://www.atesia.it>

12. Teleperformance USA (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group) \*  
<http://www.teleperformanceusa.com>

13. PCCW Contact Center Business \*  
<http://www.pccw.com/contactcenter>

14. TCIM Services, Inc. \*  
<http://www.tcim.com>

15. GC Services Limited Partnership \*  
<http://www.gcserv.com>

16. Teleservices Direct  
<http://www.teleservicesdirect.com>

17. Influent Inc.  
<http://www.influentinc.com>

18. Millennium Teleservices LLC  
<http://www.mmtel.com>

19. APAC Customer Services, Inc. \*  
<http://www.apaccustomerservices.com>

20. OKS Ameridial \*  
<http://www.oksameridial.com>

**CATEGORY C — GLOBAL TOP 50 RANKING, AGGREGATE INBOUND & OUTBOUND, DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL**

1. SR. Teleperformance  
<http://www.srteleperformance.com>

2. Convergys Corp. \*  
<http://www.convergys.com>

3. SITEL Corp. \*  
<http://www.sitel.com>

4. ClientLogic \*  
<http://www.clientlogic.com>

5. NCO Customer Management Inc. \*  
<http://www.ncogroup.com>

6. GC Services Limited Partnership  
<http://www.gcserv.com>

7. ICT Group, Inc. \*  
<http://www.ictgroup.com>

8. APAC Customer Services, Inc. \*  
<http://www.apaccustomerservices.com>

9. Msource Corp. \*  
<http://www.msource.net>

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 Canada: Tel: 514-426-3013 Fax: 514-426-3953

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# Extending In-House Call Capacity With Home Agents

Companies in different industries experience temporary spikes in call volume at different times and for different lengths of time. For some, these spikes typically come during the holidays, lasting for several days or weeks, while others may get most of their calls at night and on weekends yearlong. How can these companies ensure prompt and attentive customer service during peak call hours without breaking the bank? It's too expensive to hire extra contact center agents and to outfit them with workstations and equipment that may go unused the rest of the time. And if maintaining service levels is a priority, offshore may not be the best solution either.

Home agents, a possible answer, are a cost-effective solution for extending internal call capacity during high-volume call periods. Because these agents work in their homes, a company can significantly reduce overhead costs such as extra office space and computer equipment.

Besides customer care cost savings, other reasons companies are coming to West to extend their internal operations with home agents rather than going with more traditional options include the following:

- **Higher-quality agents.** The ability to work from home and set one's own schedule attracts a better-educated workforce. Eighty-nine percent of West's home agents have some college education. In addition, West's per-minute compensation structure and performance-based routing continuously incentivizes agents to both maximize upsells and provide superior service.
- **Agents with specific industry skills.** West's Virtual ACD enables agents to be based anywhere in the U.S. In fact, West has agents working from home in all 50 states.
- **Quicker ramp-up to meet unexpected call spikes.** West has nearly two decades' worth of data it uses to predict appropriate staffing levels to meet client needs. However, should an unpredicted spike in call volume occur, home agents can be ramped up and brought online much faster than traditional brick and mortar agents can.
- **Flexible cost structures.** West at Home agents are primarily compensated only for "talk time" — time spent on the phone serving customers — or for "wrap time" — time spent completing a transaction after the call has ended. West's infrastructure automatically captures and records all of these data. For simple transactions, home agents can be compensated on a per-minute basis, a model that gives companies maximum flexibility to pay only for the service they need. For more complex applications, a per-hour fee might be in the company's best interest. West can structure home agent programs in a variety of ways.
- **Ability to extend or expand existing customer care operations.** West offers both managed and hosted home-agent solutions. With the managed model, West provides the technology and the agents, and links them seamlessly with a client's existing operation. In the hosted model, West provides the technology for companies to use with their own agent pool.

Linked with a company's internal customer care operations and databases, home agents are a cost-effective way for companies to

augment internal resources with skilled customer care and sales representatives based in the U.S. Best of all, these companies ensure they are covered during both anticipated and unexpected call spikes, virtually eliminating missed calls and long wait times.

For more information, please contact West Corporation at (800) 841-9000, or visit <http://www.west.com>.

## A Wallflower's Perks: Selling The Work-From-Home Concept To Attain Higher-Quality Agents

For companies potentially considering home-based call center agents, there are some convenience and lifestyle selling points these companies should think about in order to persuade high-quality agents who are skeptical to become virtual call center agents.

Because they don't have to dress up to go to work, some have been known to wear pajamas while walking customers through service processes. They save on lack of car and gas expenses. There is no one physically looking over their shoulder (except maybe a child or the pet beagle); their calls can still be monitored, and supervisors can watch the calls and observe the effectiveness of the agents as they can at the traditional call center. Further, sometimes a small portion of the home office's expenses on taxes, as well as part of mortgage and rent, may be written off (dependant upon contracts and company offering of space).

Also, neurotic as it sounds, there are some agents who are wallflowers when face-to-face with others but are superior at their job over the phone or Internet, and so working alongside other employees or having camaraderie with co-workers matters none, making working at home both finer and more productive.

A significant benefit for these home-based agents lies in that, often virtual contact center services providers allow their agents to choose their own work hours. If you're an agent and you have an important appointment midday, you don't have to take a sick/personal vacation day; rather, go to your massage appointment, and then take customer service calls in your living room later in the evening.

It takes prodigious self-discipline and self-motivation on behalf of the work-from-home agent to abide this work style and make it work to the employer's advantage, but with these practical perks in mind to offer, companies should be able to attain higher-quality employees with specific industry skills for when these companies seek an alternative to traditional call centers or to sending work overseas.

*David B. Butcher, Assistant Editor, Customer Inter@ction Solutions*

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# Customers Love Online Interaction

Walk into any retail store or financial institution and you will typically hear, “May I help you?” at some point shortly after you arrive. As consumers, we expect to be approached, even if we know what we want and are only running into the store to pick up one item. If you were the owner of a store, would you let hundreds of people walk through your doors and never ask them if they needed help? Of course you wouldn't. You would be letting potential sales turn around and walk out the door, perhaps to the competition.

However, many online companies do exactly that. They let their Web site visitors wander around their sites without ever offering assistance. Some sales are consultative in nature and require some expertise to help drive the process along; think about car purchases in a physical setting. No one walks onto a car lot without being approached in fewer than 90 seconds. Other types of transactions are more of rote, and just as some sales in physical settings don't require assistance, the same is true for some sales transactions conducted over the Internet.

## All Purchases Are Not Created Equal

There is a big difference between buying a loaf of bread and buying an automobile. Before a customer buys a car, he or she asks many questions: “What is my trade-in worth?”; “What kind of financing do you offer?”; “Which features are standard?”; “Which features are options?” You probably don't ask a grocery clerk any questions before you buy a loaf of bread.

The same holds true in the online world: people buying consultative goods are going to have questions and will need help. Commodity products, such as books or DVDs, naturally require lit-

tle consultation, both in physical and online arenas. People browsing Amazon.com most likely know the titles they want — or can at least easily find the information they need about those titles — and if they like the prices, they add those titles to their shopping carts and complete their transactions.

Consultative goods, on the other hand, typically require a thorough understanding of product features; the customer has a need to compare similar products and receive suggestions based on his or her needs. This is true for items such as mortgages, cars or insurance policies. As with commodity products, consultative products always require this level of attention and help, *regardless* of whether the purchase is happening in a physical setting or in an online setting. It's rarely difficult to get attention and help in a physical location. It is, however, difficult to receive the same assistance in an online setting. This is where live assistance can make a huge difference by keeping transactions moving forward. Companies that are currently not providing this service are

missing a large opportunity to lower abandonment rates and increase transactions.

## Customers Still Need Help... Even Online

The aforementioned example of a browser purchasing books and DVDs on Amazon.com illustrated an online commodity purchase. Let's examine an online consultative purchase. For the sake of illustration, let's pretend you are the president of Bank XYZ. A customer, Stan, is looking for a mortgage and goes to Bank XYZ's Web site to do research. He has compared interest rates and terms and decides he would like to apply for a mortgage with Bank XYZ. However, Stan is confused by one part of the mortgage application and has a question. Where can he go online for immediate help? If such help isn't immediately available, Stan is likely to become frustrated and abandon the Web site.

Of course, Stan may also abandon the site because he has not yet made up his mind about applying for a mortgage from Bank XYZ. He is researching and comparing all of the different types of mortgages, terms and conditions, and he finds it all very confusing. Stan

By Cindy Curtin  
Proficient Systems



decides to leave and shop both elsewhere and at another time because he is overwhelmed and needs guidance.

As the president of the bank, you should be concerned about three things: that Stan abandoned your Web site, why he abandoned it and what you could have done to avoid losing the opportunity to finance the home he wants to buy. There are thousands of Stans on your Web site every day. How many of them leave and go to competitors' Web sites? Can you quantify that lost opportunity?

Mortgages are consultative goods; they are best sold by an expert. Not many customers are self-sufficient enough to buy a home mortgage without assistance. If Stan walked into your brick-and-mortar bank, you wouldn't let him leave without answering his questions and trying as hard as possible to obtain his business, so why do that with your online bank? Without offering help to the Stans of the world — those who shop for and research consultative goods online — your only option is to hope they stick around and decide to transact with your bank.

More and more companies are seriously asking themselves these questions, bearing in mind the following statistics from Forrester Research:

- In 2004, 67 percent of U.S. households had access to the Internet. The number of online-enabled households is expected to grow by 21 percent over the next five years.

- In 2004, 21 million U.S. households paid bills online. Adoption is expected to grow by almost 50 percent to 31.2 million households in 2008.

- In 2002, 28 percent of households that connected to the Internet applied for a credit card online — by 2004 that number had increased to 39 percent.

Clearly, people are becoming more comfortable with researching and purchasing complex products over the Internet, to the extent that it's almost a prerequisite. Yet despite the availability of technology to facilitate live online assistance, to measure abandonment

rates, to provide a clear picture of lost opportunities and to generate more sales and transactions, many companies have yet to embrace Web-based service. They may believe it's difficult to implement, it requires extensive training and maintenance and/or that customers will be frustrated by it. In reality, it is easy to both implement and maintain and is

not only cost-effective, but it generates significant ROI for most companies. Finally, customers absolutely love it.

### The Fear Factor

There are reasons that companies are hesitant to proactively approach their Web site visitors. First, they are afraid of irritating, and subsequently driving

**Table 1**

### SAMPLE SURVEY for Company A, a large mortgage and home equity loan provider

Thank you for your interest in Company A. Please take a moment to provide us with feedback that will enable us to better serve your needs in the future.

- Which statement best describes your customer experience after being engaged by a loan consultant online?
  - Excellent
  - Very Good
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor
- Which of the following features of this service were the most valuable to you? (Check as many as appropriate.)
  - Asking specific questions directly of a home loan expert
  - Getting assistance finding home loan information on the Web site
  - Getting assistance understanding home loan offerings on the Web site
  - Learning about home loan options you had not considered before
  - Learning about other services or content on the Web site
- Would you be interested in having assistance in accessing the relevant information? In the future, if you again had the opportunity to engage a Company A loan consultant while using the Web site, how likely would you be to use the service?
  - Definitely would use
  - Possibly would use
  - Not sure
  - Probably would not use
  - Definitely would not use
- Does having the ability to interact directly online with a loan consultant make you more likely to use Company A for your home loan needs?
  - Yes, much more likely
  - Yes, somewhat more likely
  - Having the online interaction makes no difference
  - No, somewhat less likely
  - No, much less likely
- Please feel free to provide additional feedback or comments in the space below.

**In the early days of the Internet, we all “surfed” alone, and for many, that was part of the appeal of shopping or transacting online.**

away, their visitors. We call that “the fear factor.” That fear is understandable. In the early days of the Internet, we all “surfed” alone, and for many, that was part of the appeal of shopping or transacting online. Many people were happy to pay shipping charges to avoid mall traffic, crowded banks and overzealous salespeople.

The fear factor does not apply in a physical setting, as companies are rarely afraid to approach customers in physical locations. They should not be afraid to do so in online settings, either. Customer surveys reveal that live assistance can make a huge difference in both customer satisfaction and revenue generation because customers who are offered live assistance are appreciative and more often more willing to do future business with the company that provided them the assistance.

### Want Proof? Ask The Customers

Companies that use an online collaboration technology are able to monitor Web visitors and, if their solution includes real-time data-mining capabilities, can see which visitors are most likely to welcome a chat and eventually transact. This way, the agents or specialists are able to intelligently and opportunistically approach customers to offer assistance. Once approached, the Web site visitor may decline or accept the invitation to chat. If the visitor accepts the invitation, he or she interacts in a manner similar to instant messaging, in a private, secure, one-on-one chat.

At the close of the interaction, the customer has an opportunity to fill out a survey about the experience (see Table 1 for a sample survey). It's very important for companies to take advantage of this chance to gather data from customers, as they provide valuable insight into what they did and did not like about the overall experience, allowing companies to ascertain the effectiveness of customer service efforts.

Companies could also offer surveys to customers who decline the invitation for an online interaction, to better understand their reluctance. Following is an example of decline-survey results. Customers were asked, “Why did you choose not to use our live online chat service today?” Of those who declined the offer of assistance, 80 percent declined because they were either not ready to speak with an agent or they wanted to but did not have time at that moment.

and convenience of researching or shopping online, and having their questions answered quickly, efficiently and in a manner and time with which they are comfortable. Companies that offer live assistance earn customer loyalty and repeat business, both of which translate into top-line revenue growth. By not providing this assistance to their Web visitors, many companies are missing a viable opportunity to generate sales, earn customer loyalty and grow top-line revenue. **CIS**

*Cindy Curtin is the director of marketing for Proficient Systems in Atlanta. She can be reached at [ccurtin@proficient.com](mailto:ccurtin@proficient.com).*

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I am concerned about privacy/security.	2%
I am not ready to speak with someone yet.	61%
I did not know the live chat service was free.	2%
I did not think it would be helpful.	4%
I did not understand the live chat offer.	1%
I wanted to, but did not have time to chat.	19%
I was not sure that the chat offer was from (company name).	2%
Other (please indicate below).	8%

### Customers Do, In Fact, Want Online Assistance

Increasingly, customers appreciate both the offer of online assistance and the improved visitor experience online interaction provides, which results in an increased affinity toward the provider. In customers' minds, it combines the best of both worlds: the relative peace

# Saving Speech Recognition

Consider the following scenario: Jack, a customer of a large financial services organization, forgets to pay his credit card bill on time. He knows he can pay it over the phone and avoid a late fee, so he calls customer service and is routed into the company's [IVR \(define - news - alert\)](#) system. He listens to the long list of menu options and finally hears one about billing. He chooses that option. Jack is then prompted to use the company's speech recognition system to indicate the reason for his call. After speaking the phrase, "pay bill" several times, he is transferred to the company's insurance department. Frustrated, Jack hits zero to talk with an agent and is then put on hold for what he considers to be an unacceptably long period of time. When Jack finally reaches the correct department, he is frustrated and angry. Furthermore, the cost of serving this customer just rose dramatically because a live agent became involved.

In a recent Forrester study, 176 companies with revenues near the \$500 million mark indicated they would spend more money this year on a wide range of customer experience categories. These organizations realize that the IVR (and similarly the Web site) is often the "welcome mat" to their customers. For many customers, navigating an IVR feels like walking while wearing a blindfold. Customers can be easily confused when the rules change from step to step. In an ideal world, a customer would enter an IVR system, tell it what the desired task is, and it would route the customer to the proper area of the application. In reality, creating this perfect IVR is a very difficult endeavor.

On the flip side, organizations can drastically cut costs by directing customers to IVR systems in order to allow them to self-serve. Each time someone like Jack zeroes out to speak with a customer service agent, it costs the company anywhere from \$5 to \$15, according to Forrester Research. Compare that with self-service interactions that typically cost no more than a dollar or two

per transaction and you see why companies are feeling the need to optimize these systems, making them effective for both company and customer. So what are the methods companies can deploy to help solve this problem?

## Design Documentation

IVR design documentation allows designers to see the ins and outs of your speech or IVR system. Similar to a schematic layout, which would allow you to see how mechanical components are positioned, design documentation shows you the flow of your system, how callers get from point A to point B and what specific steps callers go through.

Design documentation addresses fine details. For example, it will show the number of digits the system allows after the "enter your account number" prompt and whether the customer has to press the pound sign. Often, IVR systems are built by outside firms based on

the requirements given by the company, so design documentation can be a good way for customer service managers to learn more about the customer's experience within their IVR system. Design documentation can be a good place to start when developing an overall strategy for improving customer experiences.

## Logs Or Record Files

Logs and record files are generated as a result of a customer's interaction with a specific application. For example, Jack's interaction with his bank's IVR system created a record that noted who he is, what time he called and what specific set of steps he went through. Speech system log files can also include what the system heard the caller say. In Jack's case, his spoken command of "pay bill" was translated into text and matched up with a set of grammar states which unfortunately was interpreted by the speech software as a request to be transferred to the insurance department.

Logs and record files are widely available as part of an organization's IVR system, but are not often utilized because

By Michael Chavez  
ClickFox



they can be challenging to interpret. For example, it would be difficult to reach any solid conclusions regarding problems with your IVR system by looking at a spreadsheet with log files on 100,000 calls. Additionally, logs and record files don't tell the story of the confused caller who gets stuck in an error loop and can't get out. They can be helpful in confirming specific issues, but they do not provide a "big picture" view of your IVR system.

### Agent Interviews

Interviews with customer service agents can be a great way to obtain secondhand information about the customer's experience. Agents might notice that a higher-than-normal volume of customers — six out of ten, for example — are having problems paying bills through the IVR system.

Agent interviews can be helpful to a limited degree. These employees work "on the front lines" every day, but their input is anecdotal, as they can only relay their personal experiences.

Often organizations will bring in a consultant to interview agents or will conduct usability studies. Usability studies involve direct observation of a customer attempting to navigate the system. This information can also be helpful, but

still is only a random sample and often not representative of the larger issues.

### Customer Surveys

More than 95 percent of the companies surveyed by Forrester indicated that customer surveys were either "extremely helpful" or "helpful" in their efforts to improve the customer experience. However, organizations need to recognize that survey results can be heavily impacted by the most recent experience of a customer. A customer could experience a string of bad interactions with an IVR system, then have one great experience that makes him or her forget about previous interactions. Conversely, a customer could have a fantastic call center interaction, then one very poor experience, which could directly impact the customer's responses.

### Customer Behavior Research

Among the companies surveyed in the Forrester study, 40 percent said they would spend more on customer behavioral research, which can be a great way to see the "big picture" of the IVR/speech system. Analytics and similar technologies that help organizations learn more about customer behavior can be deployed on current IVRs before they move on with more complicated tech-

nologies such as speech applications. This allows managers to look at existing systems and gain an understanding of current behavior and identify areas where deployment of speech applications would be most effective. For example, it might make sense to deploy speech within an application with low throughput resulting from a complex set of steps.

If speech applications are already deployed, the technology can specifically help organizations understand how customers are utilizing speech, highlighting areas of suboptimal performance in different areas.

### Best Practices

To achieve the most success in optimizing and streamlining an IVR system, organizations should consider deploying a combination of all of these methods. By leveraging a strategic combination of customer service interviews, surveys, logs and reporting, and customer behavior research, organizations can reduce customer frustration with IVR systems, which will result in drastic savings, while also improving customer satisfaction. **CIS**

*Michael Chavez is vice president of client services at ClickFox (<http://www.clickfox.com>).*

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# IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Award

As anyone who hasn't been living in a cave for the past several years knows, Internet protocol (IP) has acted as a "super fertilizer" for the garden that is enterprise business communications. Perhaps one of the hottest growth areas for IP is the contact center. Contact center applications, with the aid of IP, have enabled anytime, anywhere, any way, always-on functionalities that allow companies to do things about which they could only dream a short few years ago.

The call center market, analysts remind us, is mature. The best way to electrify an industry with slow and steady growth rates is to introduce a technology so necessary for competition that everyone in the market place ultimately "has to have it." Not long ago, it was computer-telephony integration (CTI), which allowed breathtaking improvements in cost efficiency and labor usage. Later came CRM, a nebulous acronym that may be fading in terminology, though not in its basic necessity. Up and coming are speech and self-service, two intertwined concepts whose potential for the customer service arena knows no foreseeable boundaries.

*Customer Inter@ctions Solutions* realizes that technology is the key to the success of any call center, as we have been editorially covering call center technology over two decades. We also realize that with new products and new categories of products in the call center space, it can be strenuous and difficult for our readers to knowledgeably keep up with the latest, greatest products and services. This is why we are offering this award program for the first time, so we may judge the "best of the best" in IP contact center technology, or compa-

nies' products that offer stand-out features, functions or capabilities — setting them apart from others in the space — and then offer our findings to our readers.

Each company that wished to participate was required to submit an answered questionnaire regarding its target market, its product's unique or distinctive features, its competitors, and, of course, a list of customer references of organizations that have deployed the solution.

The following is the list of recipients of the IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Award. Additionally, we have provided brief answers to the questions asked of them. They have been edited down for space, and some dialog has been edited so that the significant information may be offered to our readers.

To all of the recipients, congratulations.



**Amcat**<http://www.amcat.com>**Contact Center Suite '05,  
IP & Softphone**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: All communications (voice, e-mail, fax, SMS, Web chat) are routed and handled in a uniform fashion. Amcat Contact Center Suite 2005 is a platform that delivers converged communication in any customer care setting.

For distributed call centers and remote agents, the Amcat IP Call Center solution brings true cost savings and efficiencies. At the remote location, the agent's voice goes through a head set plugged directly into the PC to take advantage of VoIP and Amcat's SIP softphone implementation. IP implementation and the softphone eliminate the need to have a PBX on site to distribute the calls and eliminates the need to have a phone set on the agent's desk. Further dramatic cost savings are realized through not having to pay long-distance charges from the location of the Amcat software engine where calls are being placed or received and the remote location. Only the cost of the properly sized IP link is required for this operation along with routers on either end.

**Aspect Communications**[www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com)**Uniphi Connect**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Aspect's Uniphi Connect enables businesses to operate a hybrid IP/PSTN call center without the need for third-party IP gateway hardware. Uniphi Connect eliminates the need for a separate IP gateway by including an IP card within the ACD platform. In addition to the IP card, Uniphi Connect includes an agent desktop that allows agents to be located anywhere there is an IP connection, providing centralized

management, administration and reporting for all PSTN- and IP-based agents. With Aspect Uniphi Connect, voice and routing requests can travel over less expensive IP networks. Uniphi Connect also works in conjunction with another Aspect application, Aspect IP Network InterQueue. This combination of products allows businesses to set up one virtual contact center operation regardless of where the physical sites are located. IP Network InterQueue greatly reduces the expense of routing calls across multiple networked Aspect Call Center systems by eliminating the need for T1/E1 lines to link dispersed contact center sites.

**aveComm**<http://www.avecomm.com>**aveComm**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: aveComm is a communication and collaborative software suite designed to enable innovative ways for individuals to communicate via the Internet. aveComm is truly flexible, as it can be licensed in a variety of different packages tailored to suit the needs of every business, from small home offices to Global 1000 corporations. aveComm delivers a myriad of functionality, highlighted with an integrated and advanced audio conference bridge, allowing users to host an unlimited number of simultaneous audio conferences with an unlimited number of participants. aveComm is the only product of our type to: be fully installable behind the corporate firewall; be able to scale to thousands of users in a single conference or multiple concurrent conferences; offer voice and visual in a single interface from the same vendor completely. It is device- and environment-independent. aveComm can bridge telephone and PC-based users in conference and can seamlessly integrate with any application.

**BeVocal, Inc.**<http://www.bevocal.com>**BeVocal VoCare Managed Call Center  
Automation Solution**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: What's unique is the breadth of application modules offered to automate call centers across entire customer lifecycle, including: suites in customer acquisition; order management/tracking; billing and payment; account management; outbound notification; customer retention; and repair/service. The ARC Approach is a unique voice solution delivery model that ensures that clients systematically achieve their desired customer care automation and caller satisfaction results. To ensure that customer automation goals are met, BeVocal applies its unique *Continuous Improvement Process* to each deployment. This process has five distinct parts: high impact improvement levers; results-driven client teams; relevant KPIs and call statistics; powerful analytical & tuning tools; and regular tune-ups.

**Carrius Technologies, Inc.**<http://www.carriustech.com>**Compleat-200**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: The Compleat-200 is an intelligent IP media gateway that serves as the telecom foundation for contact center solutions. It combines media gateway, signaling gateway and call control functions in a single platform. Contact center solution developers integrate the Compleat-200 into their solutions in order to get to market more quickly with a more economic solution that can simultaneously interact with wireless, wireline, circuit and packet networks.

**Cisco Systems, Inc.**  
<http://www.cisco.com>  
**IP Contact Center (IPCC)**  
**Enterprise Edition**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Cisco IP Contact Center (IPCC) Enterprise Edition delivers intelligent contact routing, call treatment, network-to-desktop computer-telephony integration (CTI), and multichannel contact management over an IP infrastructure. By combining multichannel automatic call distributor (ACD) functionality with IP telephony in a unified solution, Cisco IPCC Enterprise (formerly Cisco IP Contact Center) enables companies to rapidly deploy a distributed contact center infrastructure. Distinctive features include the following: single implementation for multichannel ACD, IVR, CTI and outbound; distributed architecture supporting hundreds of locations; centralized management, scripting and reporting for multiple sites across the entire enterprise; flexible queuing options, including queuing and treatment at the edge of the network; and a linear scaling model to support thousands of agents.

**Convergys Corporation**  
<http://www.convergys.com>  
**Convergys Global IP Architecture**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: A connection to Convergys' Global IP Architecture provides low-latency, high reliability and flexible access seamlessly to any of Convergys' global locations. Designed for high reliability, connectivity is provided using multicarrier, redundancy and diverse routing to ensure greater reliability than that which is available from a single carrier. Also, consolidation of the number of access points enhances network security and minimizes the need for customer-provided equipment or services at each center. Hosting centers can act as back-ups to each other,

providing yet another layer of redundancy. Convergys' Global IP Architecture includes several unique and distinctive features: experienced staff; private IP network backbone; centralized hosting centers; open standards-based; global standardization; voice quality assurance; managed service; and mitigation risk of network failures.

**CosmoCom, Microsoft**  
**(joint submission)**  
<http://www.cosmocom.com> and  
<http://www.microsoft.com>  
**UniFrame**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Microsoft and CosmoCom have collaborated to create UniFrame, an integrated combination of Microsoft Customer Care Framework (CCF) and CosmoCall Universe. By creating UniFrame, Microsoft and CosmoCom have already done much of the work for a modern call center. What remains is mainly connecting CCF to the specific line of business (LOB) applications in the customer IT environment, connecting CCF to the self-service Web portal as required, and to incorporate the hooks for UniFrame's live Internet and e-mail contact management into the self-service Web portal. UniFrame facilitates inbound call screen-pops for agents that are essentially the same for telephone calls, live Internet sessions and e-mail messages. Interaction history of all channels is created automatically and stored either in the LOB CRMs or in Universe's own interaction history module, CosmoTracker offers the ability for outbound calls via any channel to be launched with a single click on the contact's phone number, e-mail address or SIP address. Historical data from the contact center is fully mapped into the CCF abstraction layer, providing a source of unified reports that contact center managers will find invaluable in assessing the overall performance of their operations.

**Five9**  
<http://www.five9.com>  
**Virtual Contact Center (VCC)**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Five9 Virtual Contact Center is a hosted contact center ASP with all of its customers running VoIP completely independent of a traditional telecom company and without any ties to a PSTN-based infrastructure. Virtual Contact Center is built from the ground up to eliminate third-party license fees and to ensure costs are kept low. Along with its VoIP functionality, the Virtual Contact Center offers the following: ACD; predictive dialer; CRM; IVR; CTI; remote agent capabilities; skills-based routing; recording; silent monitoring; real-time reporting; chat; and centralized management for multisite and offshore contact centers.

**Gryphon Networks**  
<http://www.gryphonnetworks.com>  
**Exemption Advisor**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Gryphon Networks Exemption Advisor is the first technology to enter the market that entirely automates the exemption management process for the calling agent. Exemption Advisor is a powerful addition to the Gryphon Networks Compliance Suite of outbound calling technologies. It significantly increases the effectiveness of sales campaigns while providing comprehensive management of federal, state and internal do-not-call lists. Gryphon Networks Exemption Advisor automatically identifies dialed numbers that qualify as an exemption under state and federal DNC rules, dramatically reducing the amount of time, resources and expertise involved with checking millions of transactions against internal customer data. Exemption Advisor ensures that only lawful calls are placed to numbers otherwise restricted by their presence on state or federal do-not-call lists.



Its distinct feature is that Gryphon Exemption Advisor is the first technology to enter the market that entirely automates the exemption management process for the calling agent through the telephone.

#### Intelis, Inc.

<http://www.intelis-inc.com>

#### Intelis Call Center

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: The Intelis Call Center application, with its automatic call distribution (ACD) capabilities, supports live and automated agent call center functionality with integrated customer billing, reporting and validation services. The call center features are specifically designed to support the unique requirements of call center providers that offer multiple product applications on a single platform. The ACD application is the core of several applications that may run on top of the Intelis Call Center Platform. The platform supports numerous ancillary applications, in addition to the core ACD, including but not limited to customer service, operator services, directory assistance, answering service, alarm monitoring center, proprietary travel card, prepaid calling and various call routing applications.

#### Interactive Intelligence Inc.

<http://www.inin.com>

#### Customer Interaction Center (CIC)

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: From the ground up, CIC was developed based on an interaction engine that processes, on a single platform, all types of interactions. Unlike traditional solutions either requiring multiple "boxes" to run multichannel applications, or other supposed "bundled" solutions assembled through acquired products, CIC offers a truly all-in-one multichannel solution for a single point of administration, end-to-end reporting, lower TCO and faster

ROI. Also, CIC was one of the first standards-based interaction management software systems on the market and offers the unique advantage of interoperating with a wide range of third-party hardware, switching platforms and peripheral devices, thus eliminating the type of vendor lock-in associated with proprietary solutions. CIC both offers a full range of multichannel contact center features and can be extended to support the entire enterprise by simply purchasing new licenses rather than undergoing costly forklift upgrades. It also offers seamless call recording and predictive dialing, as well as multisite support and scalability.

#### LumenVox

<http://www.lumenvox.com>

#### ArtiSpeech

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: LumenVox's ArtiSpeech (LVAS) integrates seamlessly with Vertical Communication's (Artisoft) TeleVantage to speech-enable the name directory, allowing all callers to have hands-free and numeric-free phone interactions. It allows for alternate names, nicknames and various spellings and pronunciations to be recognized. In addition, this solution enables users to retrieve, reply and manipulate e-mail, navigate voice mail and access IVR applications. New features in version 2.0 include additional functionality in voice mail, e-mail and administrative options. Users can utilize speech to access and place an outbound call to any of their TeleVantage personal or company contacts. Also, TeleVantage administrators can configure their databases remotely for easier access.

#### Mitel Networks

<http://www.mitel.com>

#### Visual Architect with Call Center Stimulator

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

Improve  
first call  
resolution.

Improve  
workforce  
planning.

Improve  
agent  
effectiveness.

A: With the Visual Architect and Call Center Simulator, the challenging task of managing a contact center enterprise has been simplified. With use of the Visual Architect, a drag-and-drop “visio” interface is used to design a network of contact centers for the enterprise and for with Mitel’s XML technology (MiXML), and it can be implemented from a single desktop. The Call Center Simulator can be used to ensure that all service levels are achieved or maintained for every ACD Media Queue in the enterprise. This is performed by using historical call record information or preset values. The Simulator will show information such as calls waiting, answered call percentage, abandoned call percentage and service levels. The Visual Architect can be used to tweak the design of the contact center until acceptable service levels have been proven by the Simulator. The Visual Architect can then be used to program and implement the complete enterprise of Mitel’s 3300 IP systems.

**NetOffice**

<http://www.netoffice.com>

**NetOffice Suite**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: NetOffice Suite 2005 can be customized for small, medium, large or government organizations. It includes the following capabilities in one system: unified messaging; a toll-free number with follow-me; contact management; data backup and management; detailed call reporting; automatic e-mail campaign management; e-fax; calendar sharing/collaboration; task management; and message handling. Distinctive features include the following: integrated computer telephony, fax and e-mail; sharing and collaboration; unified inbox; contacts; CRM; files; calendar; tasks; data backup; and automatic e-mail marketing — all from one place on the Web.

**Nexidia**

<http://www.nexidia.com>

**NEXminer Enterprise**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: Nexidia’s technology features the unique, patent-pending Phonetic Search Engine, which is an open-vocabulary retrieval system that greatly reduces the time and increases the accuracy of searches against large collections of recorded speech. Unlike the other audio search and analytics vendors, Nexidia does not translate the audio file to text in order to search. Because the technology is based on phonemes (the most basic unit of human speech), NEXminer Enterprise can search/analyze blended words, proper names, slang, industry terms, jargon and code words, which are generally not found in traditional dictionaries. NEXminer also supports many more languages than its competitors, including North American English, Latin American Spanish, German, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Gulf States Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Farsi and Iraqi.

**NICE Systems**

<http://www.nice.com>

**NICE VoIP**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: NICE VoIP provides a full range of recording applications, including Total Recording, Selective Recording, Recording-on-Demand, and Quality Management Recording. The system works seamlessly with blended (traditional and VoIP) environments and is fully integrated with NICE’s Customer Experience Management (CEM) Platform. Organizations can record with NICE VoIP across new communication channels, while capturing and analyzing interactions for compliance or quality management. With NICE VoIP, every interaction becomes an opportunity to enhance customer experience in ways that reduce liability and increase customer satisfaction.

**Nortel**

<http://www.nortel.com>

**Nortel IP Contact Center**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: By deploying IP with Nortel contact center solutions, a company also can increase savings and reduce operating costs. Rather than maintain separate voice and data infrastructures, they can be converged to operate more efficiently and reduce staffing and training costs. Nortel IP Contact Center solutions include the following: Symposium Call Center Server; Symposium Express Call Center; Succession 1000; and Symposium Web Center Portal. Nortel IP Contact Center uniquely offers a comprehensive range of multimedia capabilities with the same reliability and quality users have come to expect with a TDM-based solution. Because Nortel IP Contact Center solutions are infrastructure-neutral, they do not require a proprietary data network and they function independent of network infrastructure: IP, TDM or mixed. Employees, agents, supervisors, managers and administrators can all work anywhere they have secure Internet access, not just in locations on the company WAN, using softphones and browser-based tools.

**Nuance Communications, Inc.**

<http://www.nuance.com>

**Nuance Voice Platform 3.0**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Nuance Voice Platform 3.0 is the industry’s first open, standards-based VoiceXML platform that is optimized for the deployment and operation of voice automation solutions. Nuance Voice Platform 3.0 allows enterprises and telecommunications companies to fully realize the cost savings, revenue generating and customer satisfaction potential of voice automation solutions. Featuring a new application design and deployment environment, it offers integration with Nuance’s latest speech tech-



nologies, as well as broadened support for a range of standards and operating systems. Organizations also benefit from the seamless migration between on-premise and hosted environments. A new, key component of the Nuance Voice Platform is the Nuance Application Environment, which helps businesses overcome common barriers to implementing speech solutions from design through post-deployment. Other key elements of the Nuance Voice Platform 3.0 include Nuance Conversation Server and Nuance Management Station.

#### **Nuasis Corporation**

<http://www.nuasis.com>

#### **Nuasis NuContact Center**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: The Nuasis NuContact Center is a software-only, multimedia, single network system for multisite routing and multisite management that offers companies all the familiar and required functionality of traditional ACDs, with improved multisite management capabilities and dramatically lower acquisition and operating costs.

The unique technology behind the NuContact Center is its patent-pending Enterprise Routing Architecture (ERA). ERA allows companies to manage multiple contact centers as a single center. The NuContact Center also offers the following: best-agent routing across the network; a single agent desktop for all media; lower operating costs; CTI built in; unmatched scalability; and the system is designed for mission-critical operation (i.e., system availability can be installed).

#### **Parus Interactive**

<http://www.parusinteractive.com>

#### **Parus Interactive Retail Voice Response Solutions**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: Our products are speech-driven

and hosted. We provide highly customized application development. We can host carrier-grade PSTN/VoIP telecommunication services, and we can port local numbers. Parus Interactive has its own cost-efficient, converged PSTN/VoIP Media Switching Platform, which we control exclusively. Moreover, we have intelligent routing technology, of which our speech apps take full advantage. Our multiple Web and voice technologies are keys in delivering the high value marketing services to customers in the retail market segment. With our new, unique and proprietary voice application development framework, we can design, develop, maintain, customize and support simple or complex packaged and custom speech applications significantly faster and cheaper than most competitors.

#### **Plantronics, Inc.**

<http://www.plantronics.com>

#### **Plantronics CS50-USB Headset System**


*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: The Plantronics CS50 Wireless Office Headset System brings the ultimate in mobility and hands-free conversations to your phone. The CS50 gives you eight hours' of talk time and the wireless convenience to roam up to 300 feet with secure conversations. And remotely taking or ending a call is as simple as pressing a button with the optional Plantronics HL10 Lifter. Also, VoIP users gain unprecedented mobility and wireless freedom with the Plantronics CS50-USB, the industry's only wireless USB headset system to deliver call answer/end capability and remote ring detection. Leveraging Plantronics' successful CS50 wireless headset system for the office, the CS50-USB allows users to roam up to 200 feet from their PC softphones without missing calls.

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## IP CONTACT CENTERS



**Siemens Communications, Inc.**  
<http://communications.usa.siemens.com/home.html>

### HiPath ProCenter Agile Version 6.0

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: ProCenter Agile's Agent desktop has an innovative GUI design and provides presence and collaboration tools for increased first-contact resolution. Agile's presence-enhanced tools include a "Team List" and a "Team Bar" integrated in the application's desktop to allow agents to visually monitor the real-time availability of other agents, managers and subject matter experts across the enterprise. Additionally, Agile's Agent desktop is extremely customizable with the following: "tear off and park" toolbars; single "click" to change Agent desktop language "on-the-fly" to one of six languages; a "compact mode" to reduce screen footprint to a system tray icon; streaming real-time statistics and personal performance data; softphone with a full set of telephony tools; and automatic screen-pop with customer and call details, synchronized with the arrival of each call at the desktop.

**Sivox Technologies, Inc.**

<http://www.sivox.com>

### SIVOX RealCall 4.0 Enterprise

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: In SIVOX RealCall 4.0 Enterprise, we've included remote training access, connectivity to different enterprise apps and support for IP environments. SIVOX RealCall supports remote agents. Agents in the field merely install the client software from a CD or from a secure Web site, enter their username and password, and they are ready to begin their own customized contact center training program. The remote training module supports all the features and functions of the network-based SIVOX RealCall, such as real-time coaching, voice recording and agent grading and cen-

tralized data reports. SIVOX RealCall has also been re-engineered to provide a solid platform for future training suite applications.

**Stealth Communications, Inc.**

<http://www.stealth.net>

### The Voice Peering Fabric

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: The Voice Peering Fabric is a distributed Layer 2 Ethernet Fabric for the purpose of exchanging VoIP traffic. The service provides an economical traffic exchange environment where VoIP participants can directly connect to each other, avoiding unnecessary delays and relays. The VPF also incorporates free access to the VPF ENUM Registry, allowing its members to send and receive calls directly among one another within the IP domain, bypassing the PSTN and eliminating termination charges.

**Stratasoft**

<http://www.stratasoft.com>

### StrataSIP Web Agent

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: StrataSIP Web Agent is a VoIP-enabled softphone that uses SIP for use on the StrataDial.VC2 call center software suite. StrataDial.VC2 includes full support of remote call center agents for processing both inbound and outbound (blended) calls. Utilizing the latest advancements in VoIP and SIP, remote agents can be launched from anywhere in the world. These remote call center agents appear as seamless members of the entire call center agent pool and can be monitored, adjusted and activated exactly like agents working in the call center — using only a Windows-based PC, a high-speed Internet connection and a USB headset. Remote center or home agents can now be turned up without having to ship hardware devices for conversion from IP to analog.



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**Strategic Computer Support**

<http://www.strategicinc.com>

**ASD Softswitch**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: With a focus on contact center needs and functionality at the heart of our design, as well as an acute understanding for ROI, ASD Softswitch has been designed to facilitate current and anticipated future needs. Artificial intelligence has been incorporated into our products to learn from the existing environment, allowing supervisors and managers to focus on the activity of supporting their agents. We deliver a turnkey system, and many times our installation is accomplished in one day. Our philosophy is to offer all the functionality needed for a call center (inbound, outbound, blended calling, VoIP, IVR, digitized recordings, video/audio monitoring, etc.) for one low fee per agent. This allows our customers to implement features and functionality on their schedule as their business needs grow. Further, as new features are added to the system, customers receive them at no added cost as part of our maintenance package.

**SupportSoft**

<http://www.supportsoft.com>

**ServiceVerify**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: SupportSoft's solution is able to identify problems at the premises (or at the computing endpoint) and within the IP network — something unique to only SupportSoft.

**Telephony@Work, Inc.**

<http://www.telephonyatwork.com>

**CallCenter@nywhere**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: CallCenter@where is an "Integrated-by-Design" multimedia, multisite IP contact center system. It is deployed in both single- and multiple-site contact centers and in mission-critical

cal networks for service providers. The most common contact center applications — such as voice mail, IVR, quality monitoring, e-mail, Web chat and collaboration, and outbound predictive and preview dialing — are integral to the design, resulting in greater functionality, increased productivity, and lower acquisition and operating costs. Some of its unique features are as follows: integrated-by-design status; its adaptability; mirrored hot standby redundancy; its scalability; thin clients; site independence; its skills-based routing; outbound campaign support; its multichannel data store; and, finally, its multitenant capabilities.

**TeleTech Holdings, Inc.**

<http://www.teletech.com>

**TeleTech On Demand**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: TeleTech On Demand services provide clients access to our technology infrastructure on an as-needed basis. This approach offers multiple benefits: decreased capital expenses, availability of new capabilities without investing in infrastructure and the people to support it. With TeleTech On Demand, technology services are available anywhere, 24/7, enabling clients to deploy infrastructure consistently across all facilities. Clients can outsource their entire customer management functionality to TeleTech, or they can access services *à la carte* while retaining existing staff. On Demand products and services include Intelligent Systems On Demand, Performance Applications On Demand and Dynamic Insights On Demand.

**Toshiba American Information Systems Inc. – Digital Solutions Division**

<http://www.telecom.toshiba.com>

**Toshiba Strata CIX**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: All features to all users, no matter where they are, as the system supports IP phones, IP wireless handsets, both

analog and digital telephones, IP soft-phones on laptops and tablet PCs. Because it is built on open standards, the Strata CIX will also work with standards-based SIP telephones. The Strata CIX FeatureFlex adaptability feature allows users to customize their own individual features to help them be more efficient with their communications solution. Toshiba's new system administration tool, eManager, unifies the programming of Toshiba's Strata CIX and the Strategy ES Voice Processing system, allowing technicians and system administrators to program both systems together. My Phone Manager, a new personal administration tool, gives control to end users, putting personalization in the hands of individual users. Additional capabilities and features include the following: multiple (i.e., numerous; e.g., 250+) applications on a single system; pure IP or add digital TDM; and Toshiba's legendary migration path.

**Utopy, Inc.**

<http://www.utopy.com>

**SpeechMiner**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: Utopy SpeechMiner is a speech analytics solution for contact centers within enterprises, service providers and outsourcers. Our patent-pending Deliberate Listening voice data mining technology transforms recorded customer-agent telephone conversations into mission-critical information, reports and alerts that help managers and executives improve customer satisfaction and enhance agent productivity. SpeechMiner can automatically listen to thousands of calls and categorize them to determine why customers are calling; can identify best practices; can detect callers' churn behaviors; and can identify call deflection call-types. SpeechMiner can extract a wide range of hidden business intelligence directly from customers to help managers improve systems, procedures and people to deliver higher

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**VoiceGenie Technologies Inc.**

<http://www.voicegenie.com>

**NeXusPoint**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: NeXusPoint is a standards-based software platform powering customer contact solutions and next-generation networks. VoiceXML 2.0 certified, it delivers flexible, reliable and scalable infrastructure for developing and deploying DTMF (touch-tone) or speech-enabled applications. With a feature-rich, robust and high-performance architecture, NeXusPoint facilitates speech application deployment for any type or size of business, whether you are deploying simple touch-tone IVR services for customer self-service, improving internal operations with automated attendants or hosting sophisticated voice services for high-impact revenue enhancements. Version 6.4 includes the following new features: broader operating support; enhanced reporting and monitoring features; improved standards support; extended ASR/TTS support; and an entirely open architecture. Platform performance offerings: low latency; high scalability; and high density.

**VoIP, Inc.**

<http://www.voipinc.com>

**voiptrunking**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: voiptrunking is a new offering allowing new and existing IP-enabled PBX operators to peer with the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in their native VoIP protocols. This application allows subscribers to fully leverage the power and functionality of their next-gen systems, while finally reaping the toll savings that contact center and

enterprise customers expect from VoIP. Unique features include these: native VoIP interconnection to existing IP-PBX operators; the ability to select and provision U.S. toll-free numbers from all major U.S. markets in real time, via customer Web portal; automatic disaster recovery and overflow for inbound numbers; and the ability for calls to be routed to customer-defined intercept message.

**Witness Systems**

<http://www.witness.com>

**eQuality ContactStore for IP**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: The eQuality ContactStore for IP platform provides converged voice and data networks with the high level of sophistication and robust feature set that has long been accepted as standard in telephony recording. eQuality ContactStore for IP offers the following: scalable Web-based architecture; a single URL administration point; a single view of contacts across sites; extension management benefits; built-in business intelligence tools; recording parameter control; the ability to record both sides of conversations separately; unified database; full integration; simple software administration; and full support of the market's major switch vendors.

**Xten Networks, Inc.**

<http://www.xten.com>

**eyebeam SDK v1.1**

*Q: Would you please briefly describe your product or service?*

A: This software development kit (SDK) is used to build IP communications applications for VoIP, IP videoconferencing, instant messaging and presence. By leveraging open standards and exposing more than 28 APIs, true flexibility and maximum control is obtained through a rapid development process. Operators interested in creating a distributed IP contact center quickly could easily use the eyeBeam SDK to create the perfect end point for their needs. eyeBeam SDK 1.1 introduces the fol-

lowing SIP-based instant messaging, presence and storage management technologies: instant messaging; contact-list management; privacy management; peer-to-peer presence; server-based presence; server-managed contact lists; server-side contact list/privacy list; storage using WebDAV or XCAP; server-side contact list sharing, using XCAP; server-side privacy management, using XCAP; and automatic updates to contact lists/privacy lists.

**Zeacom, Inc.**

<http://www.zeacom.com>

**Zeacom ContactCenter**

*Q: Are there any unique or distinctive features about your product or service?*

A: Zeacom ContactCenter (formerly Smart Connect, also known as Q-Master) improves the routing and reporting of all inbound and outbound customer contacts, whether by voice, e-mail, Web chat or fax. This solution is unique in its class because of its unparalleled depth of real-time reporting and third-party integration capabilities, single GUI administration across multiple IP-PBX platforms and its multichannel universal queuing engine. Further, its integrated voice mail application offers user/caller profiles, and visual agent presence throughout the IP network and with built-in Outlook Calendar integration. Other features and capabilities: caller I.D. of abandoned calls; real-time call center metrics available to all agents via desktop application; all multichannel modules across multiple IP-PBX platforms are managed from a single administration application; and Outlook Calendar integration with messaging application. **CIS**

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# IP Contact Center Technology: What You Need To Know (Part II)

## Multisite Contact Center Technology Centralization: Eliminating The Risks

Last month, we focused on how multisite organizations can leverage [IP contact center \(define - news - alert\)](#) technology to maximize productivity through more efficient routing while dramatically reducing technology operating costs and increasing the overall quality of their customer service delivery. We also focused on a few core technological pitfalls that can be easily avoided early on — but which inevitably lead to disaster if they aren't addressed up front.

This month, we'll be focusing more on how software architectures can determinatively impact the *political* viability of any technology centralization initiative; in other words, how technology can overcome rather than reinforce the traditional objections to technology centralization.

### Technology Must Address Political Realities

In general, local managers can't be counted on to support a technology centralization initiative that would place their site's operational efficiency (upon which their careers and compensation are typically dependent) in the hands of a remote IT department that is not accountable within their own local reporting structure.

One option, of course, is to try to bulldoze over those objections and gain approval for implementing shared infrastructure anyway. Of course, even if you did succeed in getting the job done over local objections, the operational challenge would remain — since local productivity *could* ultimately be compromised by the whims and competing obligations of a centralized IT staff. Of course, at that point, the affected managers would already know who to blame.

### So What's The Real Answer?

The answer lies in technology that is designed-for-purpose to address the need for segmented, decentralized control over shared technology resources. In other words, the answer to winning over the opposition lies in technology that provides local managers with even greater control

over their proposed “virtual” infrastructure than they had before with traditional premise-based systems.

### “Multitenant” Technology

The term that our industry has most consistently applied to solutions that empower companies to share centralized infrastructure while maintaining local autonomy is “multitenant” technology. Interestingly, this same term also applies to technology centralization solutions that *don't* provide any mechanism for local autonomy. Given the lack of clarity in current terminology, caveat emptor (“buyer beware”) obviously applies.

### Historical Context

Today, service providers such as [MCI \(quote - news - alert\)](#), [TELUS \(news - alert\)](#), [Siebel \(quote - news - alert\)](#) (“Contact On Demand”) and others offer hosted “multitenant” contact center services as commercial alternatives to traditional premise-based systems — with “tenant autonomy” that is clearly superior to what can be achieved with traditional premise-based systems. Since companies planning to migrate to centralized infrastructures will inevitably have to address the same show-stopping issues that plagued early service provider deployments, an understanding of their early challenges is important.

### Lessons Learned From Commercial Service Providers

“Multitenancy” within shared infrastructure is a concept that grew out of the ambitions of large telephone companies and other service providers to extend their brands into “hosted” or “virtual” communications infrastructure services. Their mission was (and still is) to compete directly with traditional premise-based system vendors by eliminating the need for companies to deploy their own systems and IT staff at any corporate location.

Initially, some service providers tried hosting *dedicated* systems on behalf of

Given the lack of clarity in current terminology, caveat emptor (“buyer beware”) obviously applies.



subscriber clients; this “managed services” approach delivered little end-user value beyond a marginal labor arbitrage. Its inherent inefficiency also made early service provider offerings too expensive to capture any significant market share. It soon became clear that the missing ingredient was economies of scale — which needed to be passed on to the corporate consumer in the form of lower prices. It also became apparent that in the next-generation offering, all subscriber companies would have to be serviced from a common centralized platform.

The first deployments of multitenant technology were rushed to market and relied on retro-fitted solutions based on older, premise-based technologies. As a result, they relied on a single set of software executables to govern all “tenants”; meaning that the business logic of all locations had to be intertwined in common customized software. At that time,

“multitenancy” referred only to data segmentation — where only the proprietary data of each tenant was segmented and kept separate. This approach accomplished the objective of enabling tenant locations to share common licenses, hardware and phone lines — but it also required local autonomy to be entirely sacrificed.

The retro-fitted approach was also rife with other challenges. Since all tenant companies shared common back-end software processes, provisioning new campaigns or modifying old ones for any individual tenant carried with it the risk that new bugs would be introduced for *all* tenants. Carriers called this the “new bugs for old tenants” problem, and it effectively prevented service providers from scaling their businesses. Multitenancy couldn’t deliver economies of scale if you were afraid of adding new tenants; and customer satisfaction suffered as service providers feared the technology stability conse-

# INNOVATIVE IDEAS FROM THE NEXT-GEN CONTACT CENTER EXPERTS

quences of being responsive to their legacy subscriber tenants.

For a while after this phase, the momentum toward hosted services stagnated. While “traditional” vendors largely shied away from making any significant investments in multitenant technology, it was left to a few rebel engineers to leave the security of their traditional vendor roots and start their own companies in order to develop an entirely new breed of hosted services technology.

## The Call Center Uncentered

In the contact center industry, we’re used to old terminology falling by the wayside to make room for new terminology. We’re a technology-driven industry, and technology is subject to change at a pace that is only exceeded by that of the fashion industry. We’ve seen a lot of ideas, terms and acronyms come and go in the call center industry, including the replacement of “call center” to “contact center.” What we may never have expected to consign to the bin of old terminology is the word “center” itself.

Is a call center still a call center when its agents are distributed around the state, around the country or around the world? Are a collection of home agents, some specialists on call, one salesman on the road, an outsourced help desk and a small call center in a foreign country collectively still considered “a call center”? Can we continue to use the term when, increasingly, a single centralized location to which communications are routed doesn’t actually exist anymore?

Technologies, especially those that are Web-based and IP-enabled, have forced us to start rearranging how we think of our business environments. We’re the generation that’s having to make the largest adjustment: those of us who grew up with a single Bakelite dial phone on a table in the hallway and who understood that a long-distance phone call meant someone was dead, have had to make the mental transition to anytime, anywhere communications. Younger people in their teens and twenties, and those who are children today, won’t need to make this transition: telecommunications for them will always have been fluid, flexible and always-on.

Consider that when we make a phone call, we still refer to it as “dialing,” even though the dials disappeared off phones more than 25 years ago. Perhaps “call center” is a term that we can keep as it passes from a literal place to a virtual organization, which leaves us free to worry about only next season’s hemlines and colors.

By Tracey Schelmetic  
Editorial Director  
Customer Interaction Solutions

Soon a new service provider technology paradigm emerged that addressed all of the prior limitations and empowered the delivery of hosted contact center services at scale. Part of this new paradigm involved the ability to run separate software processes for each tenant while sharing common hardware, licenses and phone lines. This enabled tenants to enjoy autonomous control over their own technology-driven business processes without jeopardizing the stability of the centralized infrastructure or sacrificing any economies of scale. Segmented software processes also offered the added benefit of enabling an unlimited number of tenant-specific custom integrations to take place with different third-party products without resulting in “code bloat.”

This new paradigm also introduced the concept of “integration-by-design”; so the diverse contact center technologies that previously had to be cobbled together by integrators could now be easily provisioned and modified on demand from browser menus. These menus mirrored traditional needs analysis approaches in order to eliminate the need for sacrifice. Of course, Web services also had to be provided to empower both nonstandard deployments and local integrations with third-party client software.

That was five years ago. Service provider technology has matured greatly over the last five years — with carriers and service providers around the world now delivering or launching hosted contact center services at scale to their customers.

The benefit to subscriber companies arising from this unique menu-driven approach turned out to be enormous as well. It empowers tenant managers to provision their own multimedia campaigns on demand — and “fix” their own strained business processes in real time at even the most granular levels. As you might expect, companies that can address such issues quickly make more money. Not surprisingly, that intuitively obvious conclusion has also been supported by academic research.

### In Short

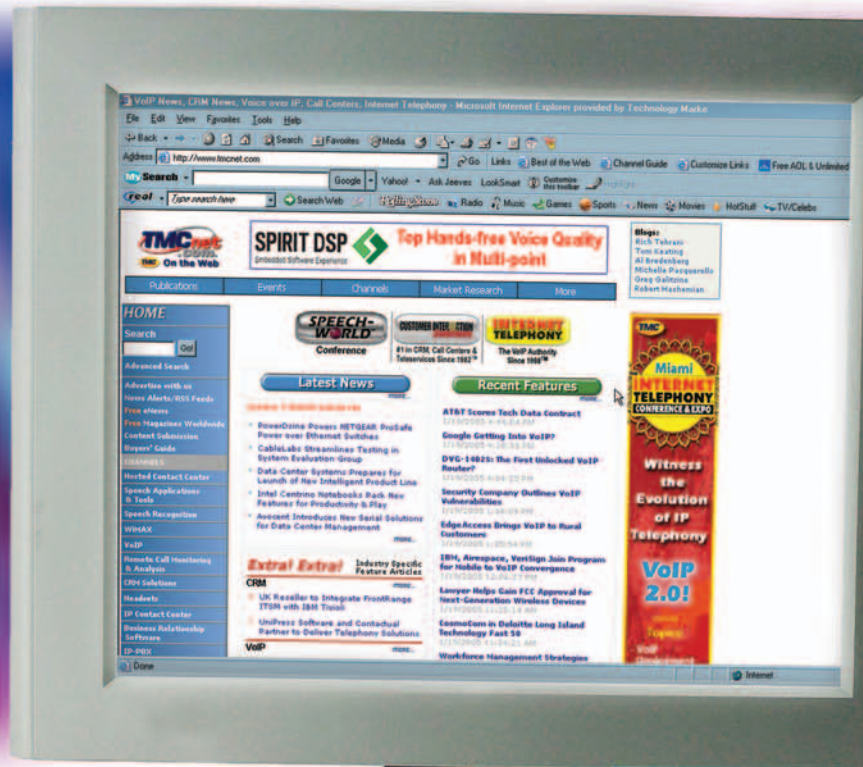
Companies considering deploying centralized infrastructure would do well to closely examine the architectural underpinnings of their proposed solutions from the historical perspective of the commercial service provider experience. Hosted services technology, originally developed for commercial hosting, has really become the enabler for successful “corporate hosting” of IP contact center technology across geographically dispersed sites.

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*Eli Borodow is the CEO of [Telephony@Work](#), the leading provider of adaptive, multitenant IP contact center technology for service providers and multimedia contact centers. Kevin Hayden is the Director of Integrated Contact Centre Solutions at [TELUS Communications Inc.](#), a tier-1 telecommunications carrier in Canada. TELUS offers Telephony@Work’s CallCenterAnywhere solution to Canadian companies on a hosted basis and is the Canadian leader in hosted contact center services.*

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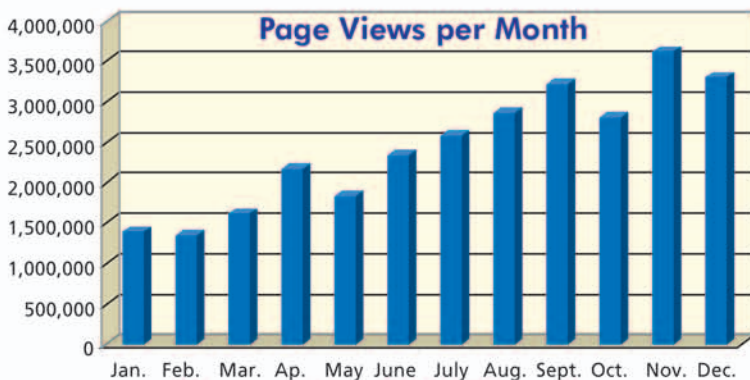
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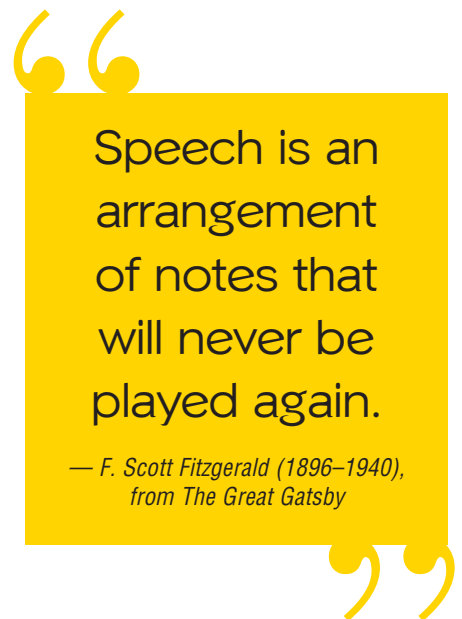
## One In Five Customers Bypass The Human Touch As Poor Service Drives Self-Service Calls

Growing customer dissatisfaction with contact center service levels is boosting the use of interactive voice response (IVR) as 20 percent of customers opt for self-service channels over agent-handled calls, reveals a new report from IT solutions and services company **Dimension Data**. The seventh Merchants Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report states that the trend toward self-service is set to continue as speech recognition technology is predicted to grow by almost 180 percent, with six percent currently using the technology and a further 17 percent planning to install it over the next 12 months. The growth of self-service channels can be explained by the report's conclusion that customers' calls are more likely to be resolved through self-service channels (76 percent resolution) than through assisted service that requires an agent to initially handle the call (50 percent). This trend toward self-service is also being driven by contact centers' cost reduction targets, which are included in almost 60 percent of all business strategies. However, it is important to note that a lack of agent service (13.3 percent of calls are abandoned before they are even answered) should not be the driver for IVR and self-service initiatives.

Andrew Briggs, CEO of Dimension Data's Customer Interactive Solutions, comments: "Self-service technology has seen considerable growth over the last 12 to 18 months as speech technologies seem to finally have come of age. User-centered design and improved functionality of speech recognition means self-service has become an accepted and even preferred choice for customers."

The report also reveals encouraging signs that the contact center industry is beginning to realize the benefits from Internet protocol (IP)-based architectures. One in five centers (20 percent) has capitalized on the flexibility and feature-rich applications that are available through IP. This represents a significant increase from the six percent who were using IP technology in 2003, while an additional five percent of respondents plan to deploy IP-based contact centers over the next 12 months.

<http://www.didata.com>



### Definition Du Jour

#### Pronunciation Lexicon Specification (PLS) Version 1.0

PLS is a developing standard of the W3C to cover recognition and synthesis of words with which the system is not familiar and the "default" lexicon cannot cope (for instance, in uncommon names or proper nouns). It helps the text-to-speech engine pronounce difficult, unrecognized words in a natural-sounding voice. A pronunciation lexicon is a collection of words or phrases together with their pronunciations specified using an appropriate pronunciation alphabet.

### LumenVox And Vocalocity Announce Solution Availability

**LumenVox**, a developer of speech recognition technologies, and **Vocalocity**, a provider of standards-enabling software components and tools, announced a co-marketing initiative and the general availability of their integrated product solution. Vocalocity's application-ready Voice Browsers are VoiceXML 2.0-compliant and include packaged integrations to several speech and telephony resources. OEM and channel partners can extend and customize the Voice Browsers to match unique deployment requirements. LumenVox's Speech Recognition Engine (SRE) is a world-class, low-level API available on both Windows and Linux platforms, is SRGS-compliant and is designed to slip into any application. The integration of the Vocalocity and LumenVox products opens the door for speech developers to cost-effectively create high-performance VoiceXML applications.

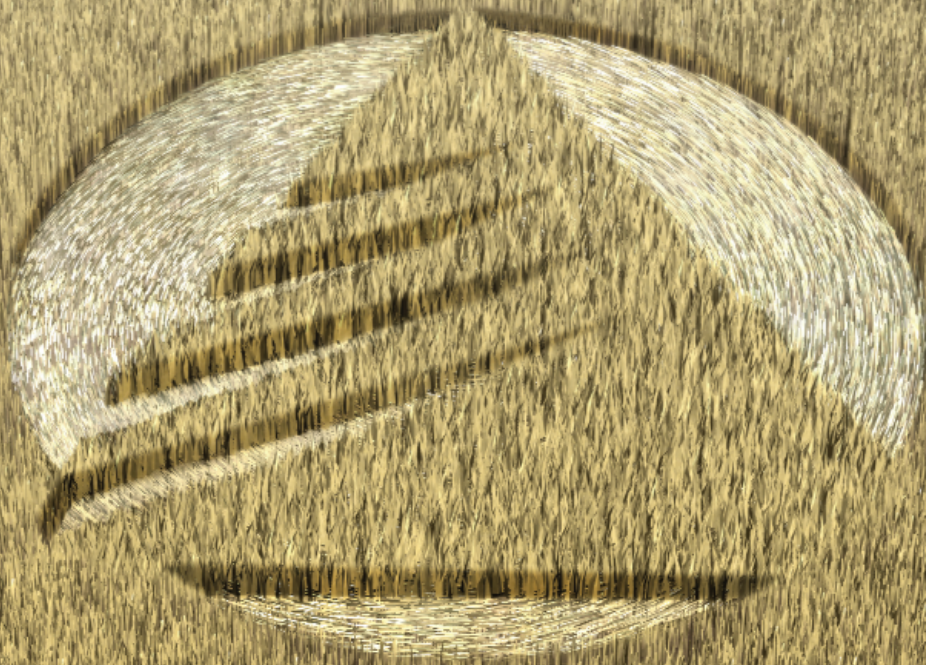
"This combined Vocalocity and LumenVox offering can be integrated within complete speech solutions very easily and cost-effectively, and we believe it will trigger further acceleration in the adoption of speech and industry standards, like VoiceXML," said John Hibel, Vocalocity's vice president of marketing. Numerous companies have signed on to deploy applications based on the LumenVox/Vocalocity solution.

"The interest in this solution has exceeded our expectations," stated Edward Miller, president of LumenVox. "We consider this solution a windfall for VoiceXML, speech recognition and the general marketplace, as companies are requesting and requiring speech-enabled applications."

The LumenVox and Vocalocity solution is available from Vocalocity and Vocalocity VARs, including Newfound Communications (<http://www.newfoundcomm.net>).

<http://www.lumenvox.com> and <http://www.vocalocity.com>

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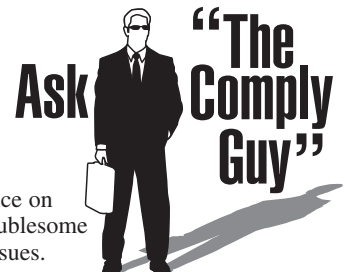


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# Half The Equation:

## Open Standards Are A First Step Toward Speech Automation

Today, well-engineered [speech recognition \(define - news - alert\)](#) systems achieve high customer satisfaction and high returns on investment in many customer service areas, including stock trading, flight information, catalog ordering and directory assistance. Although speech automation's potential has become widely recognized, few IT organizations have had the means to build or maintain speech systems, relying instead on expensive services from speech engine vendors or specialist system integrators. One major impediment to speech development efforts was removed when the industry adopted open standards and Web technologies familiar to mainstream IT organizations. However, a larger obstacle still remains: speech development methodologies and tools must improve to address the unique demands of voice user interfaces before mainstream enterprises can reliably deliver high quality speech systems at a reasonable cost.

### The First Step: Open Speech Standards

The earliest development approaches required programming in the application program interface (API) specific to each speech recognition engine. This approach burdened developers with low-level, recognition engine-specific details such as exception handling and resource management. Moreover, the proprietary nature of these APIs restricted the flexibility with which enterprises could deploy applications. Most software components had to be sourced from a single vendor and had to be deployed in a single location, and the resulting applications could not be easily ported to other platforms.

The advent of voice languages such as VoiceXML and [SALT \(define - news - alert\)](#) contributed to a Web-based development process. These languages allow a distribution of responsibilities in a speech system between a *voice browser*, which performs the speech recognition function, and a *server application*, which contains the application logic and user interface behavior (expressed in the

voice language). As a result, application developers no longer concern themselves with speech engine API calls, but instead are responsible for generating documents that can be executed by the voice browser.

[VoiceXML \(define - news - alert\)](#) (Voice Extensible Markup Language) is a standard endorsed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for speech application development. The first specification was released in March 2000 by the VoiceXML Forum (<http://www.voicexml.org/>), an industry body that now has 375 member companies, including [IBM \(quote - news - alert\)](#), [Nuance \(quote - news - alert\)](#) and [AT&T \(quote - news - alert\)](#). The latest version, VoiceXML 2.0, became a W3C recommendation in March 2004. VoiceXML voice browsers are already available through dozens of vendors; in all, a hundred or so vendors provide compliant products.

Commercial VoiceXML deployments have been estimated in the thousands.

SALT is a newer standard, proposed by the SALT Forum (<http://www.saltforum.org/>), and is somewhat competitive with VoiceXML. The intent of SALT is to facilitate multimodal applications, allowing spoken interfaces to be used in conjunction with a keyboard and a display screen, so that Web pages can be accessed by different client devices. However, SALT can also be used to build voice-only applications, and one of its targets is to simplify speech application development. The major proponent of SALT is Microsoft, but many companies support both SALT and VoiceXML, including Intel, Cisco, HP and ScanSoft. Only a few SALT voice browsers are currently available. The most prominent is Microsoft's Speech Server, which has attracted developer interest due to its integration with Microsoft's .NET framework. To date, SALT has few publicly announced commercial deployments.

VoiceXML is a larger language that contains its own procedural and trans-

By Patrick Nguyen  
Voxify



port elements. In contrast, SALT is a lightweight extension to existing markup languages, most notably HTML and XHTML. SALT tags are embedded within the HTML DOM (document object model) event and scripting environment, a model familiar to Web developers. Dialog flow is managed by combining SALT elements with DOM object properties, methods and events. This programming approach is well-suited to multimodal applications because visual and speech elements on a Web document are peers. VoiceXML, on the other hand, has constructs designed specifically for speech-only interfaces, such as dialogs with predefined execution flows.

Despite the competition, SALT supports various W3C standards associated with the VoiceXML standard, including SRGS, the W3C speech recognition grammar specification; SSML, the W3C language for controlling TTS (text-to-speech) pronunciation, emphasis and intonation; and ECMAScript, the scripting language specification. Moreover, SALT has been submitted to the W3C's Voice Browser working group, and some of its concepts may be incorporated into the next VoiceXML standard.

VoiceXML and SALT are both presentation layer languages that deliver a number of benefits. First, they are associated with a Web development model familiar to most programmers. Second, they support flexible deployment architectures — the voice browser and server application can be co-located or separated, and can be managed by the same or different entities. Third, they offer the prospect of application portability across different vendor platforms.

#### Much More Is Needed For High Usability

Despite these benefits, developing speech applications remains a complex undertaking. Industry estimates for delivering a customer-facing speech application of moderate complexity

range from 3,000 to 6,000 person hours (including requirements analysis, dialog design, coding, source system integration, audio processing, testing and tuning), and first-time efforts can be considerably longer.

Building a highly usable speech system with existing VoiceXML and SALT tools is costly, slow and difficult. Most tools implement a development model similar to that used for creating a workflow application or a touch-tone menu tree. The developer is provided a palette of dialog components and a canvas on which these components can be sequenced with some transitional logic. The dialog components encapsulate all of the prompts, grammars and presentation code (VoiceXML or SALT) required to collect a particular type of data item, such as a date, dollar amount or credit card number.

Unfortunately, dialog components are usually too atomic — they process a single question and answer containing a single data item. To implement an application of any sophistication, the developer has to manually write new components to handle more complex responses (such as user utterances that contain multiple pieces of information), as well as code the logic for any “off-topic” response; that is, a response that does not directly answer the question posed. For example, consider the following conversation whereby a caller attempts to reconfirm his or her flight details with a human agent:

**Agent:** Do you have your confirmation number?

**Caller:** Um, no, but I'm flying out of Dallas on Friday.

[The caller does not provide the confirmation number as requested, but rather gives some details about the flight.]

**Agent:** OK, departing from Dallas. Are you leaving on Friday, January 28th or Friday, February 4th?

[The agent passively confirms the recognized departure airport and then

Building a highly usable speech system with existing VoiceXML and SALT tools is costly, slow and difficult.

attempts to clarify the actual departure date.]

**Caller:** I think my wife made the reservation for the fourth.

**Agent:** OK, Friday, February 4th. And around what time is the flight? [The agent realizes that the date alone is not sufficient to retrieve the reservation and asks for the approximate time.]

**Caller:** 10:30

**Agent:** Is that a.m. or p.m.?

[The caller response is incomplete, so the agent asks a follow-up question.]

The above example illustrates that user responses in a speech application are much more varied and less structured than in a visual application. Callers may respond in many different ways due to differences in their objectives, the information they have at hand, their level of understanding and their interaction style. To achieve high usability, a speech application must be able to guide callers toward a desired outcome while allowing them latitude in their responses, such as the following elements:

- Callers may provide information in an arbitrary order of their own choosing;
- Callers may use superfluous words in their responses;
- Callers may provide multiple pieces of information in a single spoken utterance;
- Callers may provide — in a single utterance — only a subset of information requested by the application;
- Callers may clarify or correct the



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application's interpretation of information they have provided; and

- Callers may modify earlier responses in subsequent utterances.

Speech applications present a new user interaction model — one significantly distinct from the graphical user interface (GUI) model well known to all computer users. A voice user interface (VUI) requires specialized design and implementation expertise. An effective interface is critical for success in any speech application and call center system. Inexperienced callers must find the VUI intuitive. The VUI should employ natural and flexible strategies to accept information and to guide callers along the call. It should collect information in a fast and efficient manner by avoiding repetitive or lengthy prompts.

For any customer service call, there might be a straightforward path the

developer hopes callers will take. In reality, there are a multitude of different paths callers will actually take, because callers have different goals, different information at hand, different levels of comprehension, or different interaction styles. At each point in the conversation, the caller may answer the current question, or may stray from the direct path by reviewing previous responses, starting another train of thought or jumping to another part of the application. As a result, the richer the desired user experience, the more paths the developer must provide.

Current development tools facilitate the construction of a call path, but still require each path to be manually designed and configured. This approach is not practical for anything more than the simplest interactions, as the number of paths quickly becomes unmanage-

able. Furthermore, to improve usability, the developer must add, alter or remove paths by hand, which is untenable from a maintenance perspective.

#### Changing The Equation: A New Approach To Speech Development

A better approach is to drive application development at the *conversation* level, which shields the programmer from the complexity of designing and implementing every possible call path. In this approach, the development tool would provide a set of services that model the conversation skills commonly encountered in customer service calls, and would construct the call paths accordingly.

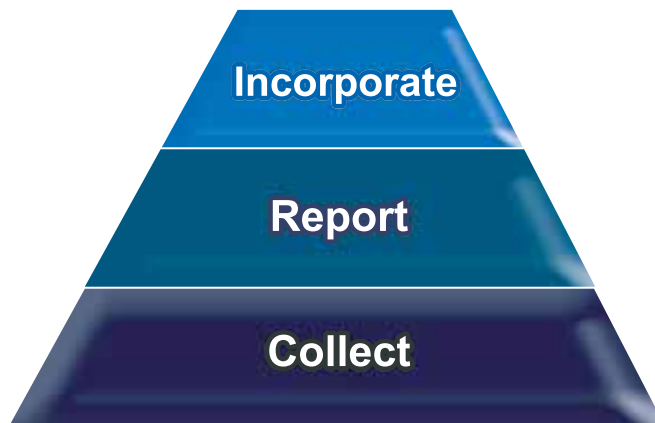
For example, a conversation skill is *disambiguation*, which is the act of determining a single interpretation among two or more plausible interpre-

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tations derived from the caller's response. Using current tools, disambiguation would be manually implemented by inserting after each existing dialog an additional dialog that asks the caller to select one value among a set of ambiguous results. By contrast, a tool that understands the concept of disambiguation could automatically generate the disambiguation call path whenever multiple interpretations arise. A more complex conversation skill is *goal-seeking* behavior, the ability to process the caller's response in the context of the objectives of the conversation. In the previous flight reconfirmation example, this skill allowed the agent to understand the caller's departure airport and date even though the question asked was actually a request for a confirmation number. A development tool that is aware

of goal-seeking behavior could automatically construct the numerous possible call paths when preconfigured with an objective, such as obtaining a flight itinerary.

By recognizing and codifying these and many other common conversation skills, a speech development tool would allow developers to implement rich and natural conversations with minimal effort. This approach achieves great savings in development cost and complexity for demanding customer-facing systems.

Open standards such as VoiceXML and SALT are necessary components for the mainstream adoption of speech automation systems. These standards offer a Web-based development model that is already familiar to IT organizations. However, they are not sufficient. Current speech development

For any customer service call, there might be a straightforward path the developer hopes callers will take. In reality, there are a multitude of different paths callers will actually take.

tools still leave too much of the hard work to the developer: conversation skills and other elements of the voice interface paradigm, such as goal-seeking behavior, flexible recognition, navigation, clarification and correction, must be reinvented and implemented for every speech system. Given the relative newness of the speech paradigm, these requirements can prove overwhelming to the developer. Speech tools and platforms will have to better facilitate the implementation of high usability capabilities before enterprises can consistently deliver high-quality customer service through their speech systems. **CIS**

*Patrick Nguyen is the chief technology officer of Voxify, which creates automated agents with the ability to handle advanced customer service calls for call centers. He began his software development career at Australia's Telstra Research Labs. Patrick has also worked for McKinsey & Company, and he has an MBA from MIT's Sloan School and a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Melbourne.*

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

## IVRs Gone Wild

I have nothing against IVRs. Most of the time, they're helpful. I appreciate that companies use them to offload common questions and encourage people to find their own answers. It's the IVRs that seem to acquire a personality of their own, desperately trying to trick the consumer off the line, that seriously irritate me.

You've probably experienced one of these.

**IVR:** Welcome to the Cybersweater Factory. We have one live agent. We plan on doing our best to not let you talk to her. Press 1 if you're calling about an existing order, press 2 if you're calling about billing, press 3 if you'd like returns information, press 4 if you'd like to update your account information, press 5 to register concern for the environment, or press 6 if you're confused and need a moment to regroup. If you press "zero" for an operator, your phone will spontaneously combust.

**Customer:** [Presses 1]

**IVR:** If you're calling about an existing order, please enter your order number.

**Customer:** But I don't have my order number.

**IVR:** I'm waiting.

**Customer:** [Presses 4]

**IVR:** If you'd like to update your account information, please enter your account number.

**Customer:** I have no idea what my account number is.

**IVR:** If you'd like to update your account information, please enter your account number. Even better, please get the hell off the phone and go to our Web site.

**Customer:** [Presses the \* key]

**IVR:** I'm sorry, that is not an available option. Would you please just go to the Web site?

**Customer:** [Presses 1]

**IVR:** I'm sorry, that is not a valid account number. If you'd like to return to the previous menu, press #. But it would be much better for both of us if you simply went to the Web site.

**Customer:** #

**IVR:** Welcome to the Cybersweater Factory. Look, haven't we been through this before? Why don't you just give up?

IVRs are like foreign films: we'll accept that we have to traverse a few layers to get the message, but when the village of Lithuanian dwarves in ceremonial robes starts seeing visions of green horses in scenes that go on for 30 minutes with no dialogue, we toss the movie out of the DVD player and put in *The Terminator*. My usual rule with accepting an IVR is three layers. If I have to go three branches down into the menu tree and my problem still hasn't been solved, I had better be able to "zero out" at that point and get a human.

More important, I expect the company I'm dealing with to recognize the fact that I've gone three branches into the IVR and am still on the phone, indicating I have an unresolved issue.

Perhaps you've had this happen to you before:

**IVR:** Welcome to the Marmoset Health Supply Store. Please press one for English.

**Customer:** [Presses 1]

**IVR:** Please press 1 for billing, 2 for ordering, 3 for a catalog and 4 for membership information from the Marmoset

Appreciation Society.

**Customer:** [Presses 2]

**IVR:** Please press 1 for vitamins, 2 for medications, 3 for toys and 4 for books.

**Customer:** But I'm looking for a bed for my marmoset! That doesn't fit into any of those categories. [Presses 0]

**IVR:** I'm sorry, that is not a valid option.

**Customer:** [Presses \*]

**IVR:** I'm sorry, that is not a valid option.

**Customer:** [Presses #]

**IVR:** I'm sorry, that is not a valid option. Good-bye! [Dial tone]

The first time an IVR cut me off at the final dead end of the menu tree, I was stunned.

Please, call center managers, supervisors and executives: if you're ever tempted to pull this trick on your IVR, go one step further and place these words in large red letters on your home page: CUSTOMERS, PLEASE GO AWAY. HERE'S THE WEB ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER OF OUR COMPETITION, MURRAY'S MARMOSET MART. HAVE A NICE DAY. In the long run, you'd be doing your customers a favor. (If you don't sell marmoset supplies, you can leave off that bit.)

My other problem is that frequently, once I've finally gotten out of the menu tree and into a holding pattern for an agent, I get this: "Your call is important to us. Please hold on, and an agent will be with you momentarily." I've been on hold for nearly 30 minutes in some cases, and heard that message, on average, twice a minute. That's 60 repetitions of the information that an agent will be with me "momentarily." Now, I'm not sure what anyone else's definition of "momentarily" is, but mine falls in somewhere under a minute. Maybe two. Please be honest. "Your call is not really important to us, but we'll take it anyway, in case you want to give us money. Please hold on, though we'd prefer you didn't, and your call will be answered sometime before Thursday."

And why are messages of this sort always accompanied by a repetitive, scratchy, thumping background reverberation, as if someone's repeatedly scraping a cantaloupe with fine-grade sandpaper? Modern technology has given us noise canceling phones, headset microphones and recording devices and sound-proof call centers, so why must "on-hold" messages always sound like they were taped under a bridge during demolition work?

Please don't scrap your IVRs. They're useful pieces of equipment, and used well, they make customers' lives easier. Just remember the old adage, "IVRs don't frustrate people, people frustrate people." **CIS**

The author may be contacted at [tschelmetic@tmcnet.com](mailto:tschelmetic@tmcnet.com).

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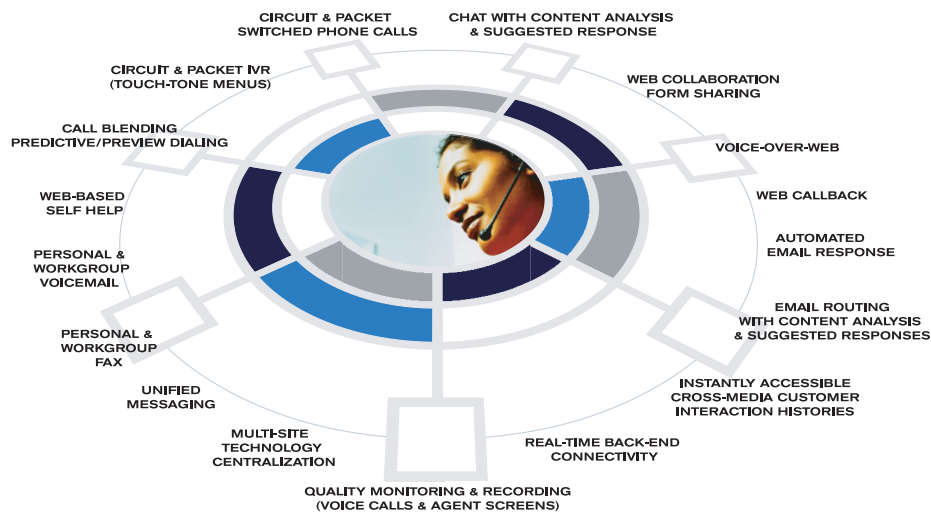
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