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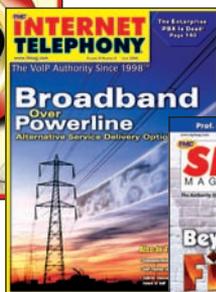
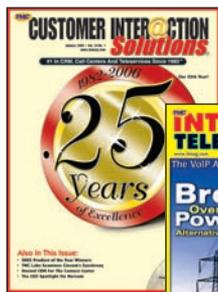
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InfoWorld	3,995	Inc. Magazine	5,695	General Motors	5,714
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By: Nadji Tehrani,  
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Editor-in-Chief,  
Technology Marketing Corporation

# Do You Have A Sales Prevention Department In Your Company?

Back in the February 1994 issue of *Telemarketing*<sup>®</sup> magazine (the parent publication of this magazine), I wrote an editorial with the above title. Since then, I have received several inquiries about this very important topic. In fact, as recently as last week, we had yet another request for a copy of this editorial.

Based on the extreme importance of this topic, I decided to revisit this matter and expand upon it with greater detail.

## Most Companies Have One, But They Don't Know They Do

As I have indicated in my editorial in 1994, many companies actually have a sales prevention department, but they are completely unaware of this fact. When I say "sales prevention department," I don't mean that these companies literally have

## Sales And Marketing Are Everything In Every Company

As you may know, I have been a student of marketing for the last 25 years; in fact, we do have a marketing test at TMC that 99 percent of the marketing managers who have taken it have failed. In my view, the test is a simple one and contains the basic knowledge that every true marketing manager must possess. There is no point in hiring a marketing manager who cannot even define marketing. In many of my previous editorials, I have elaborated on this topic, as you may know.

In many companies, the sales department is regarded as the most important department in the company. Of course, here at TMC, we do not subscribe to this thinking because we feel that every department is equally important. Having said that, my frequent associations with many CEOs within our industry and elsewhere have led me to believe that most companies, in fact, consider the sales department one of the most the important, IF NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT DEPARTMENT.

**To succeed in business, you need to understand your customers' needs as well as your customers' customers' needs.**

a separate department with that title. However, the regular violations of certain important rules that I have indicated in this editorial actually constitute a cancerous problem within many companies.



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In my way of thinking, this is not true. I feel that if you are going to rank the departments, marketing should come ahead of the sales department. Here is why:

## All Sales Begin With A Sales Lead

As I have indicated in several of my past editorials, one of the paramount responsibilities of the marketing department is to create awareness about the company, articulate the benefits of dealing with the company and highlight the company's differentiation from its competitors. The cumulative results of the above mentioned marketing functions eventually lead to the all-important lead generation which is vital to any company's growth and prosperity. In other words, the sales department will be crippled if the marketing department does not generate a stream of continuous, qualified sales leads for the sales department.

## Sales Prevention Diagnostics

Having stated the above importance of the sales and marketing departments, there are many details that need to be addressed if sales prevention is to be avoided. In this editorial, I will try to refer to as many of these problems as possible, and I ask our valued readers to address whichever factors that are most appropriate for their situations. Here are the areas that are most likely to contribute to sales prevention:

**1. Ignore The Golden Rule Of Integrated Marketing And, Most Important, Ignore The Golden Triangle.** When a company ignores the rules of integrated marketing and the golden triangle, which includes print, online and event marketing, the company has, in fact, prevented maximum lead generation for the sales department.

**2. Ignore Marketing Completely.** Believe it or not, many companies give lip service to marketing and, as far as I have been able to study, such companies either go under or, if they exist at all, they really don't get anywhere.

I recall a pair of companies that started out in the Chicago area at the same time. Company A was a master marketer and Company B did not care about marketing at all. To make a very long story short, the owner of Company A is a billionaire today while Company B is still struggling and has gotten nowhere in the same period of time!

**3. Waste Sales Leads.** Many companies spend a tremendous amount of money every year to attend trade shows or advertise in print and online and generate a considerable amount of leads. However, research indicates that as many as 70 to 80 percent of sales leads generated are either ignored completely or followed up too late to be of any use. Indeed, this is one of the leading causes of sales prevention.

**One of the paramount responsibilities of the marketing department is to create awareness about the company, articulate the benefits of dealing with the company and highlight the company's differentiation from its competitors.**

**4. Ignore Your Customers' Needs And, Most Important, Ignore Your Customers' Customers' Needs.** In this highly competitive business environment, the companies that go beyond the call of duty are those that will survive. Once again, as mentioned in many previous editorials, **to succeed in business, you need to understand your customers' needs as well as your customers' customers' needs.** Let us remember that customer care is the only sustainable competitive advantage.

**5. Ignore Sales Training.** Many companies, particularly the entrepreneurial small and medium-sized companies, have a tendency to ignore sales training. This is practically unthinkable. How can anyone expect a sales person to sell anything without know-

ing the benefits and features of the products or service they are expected to sell? Believe it or not, this problem continues to exist.

**6. Have A Nasty CEO.** Many entrepreneurial companies are started by ego-driven individuals. Wisdom and professionalism are substantially ignored when that CEO is dealing with customers. These types of individuals must never be faced with customers; it takes only one nasty remark to destroy a million-dollar deal. Believe it or not, we have observed this situation several times in the past and, unfortunately, there is not enough room to elaborate on it in this editorial.

**7. Avoid A Loose Cannon On The Sales Staff.** This is perhaps the most damaging situation for any company. A loose cannon can create not only a

tremendous amount of unnecessary problems, but he or she can destroy a relationship and prevent any and all anticipated sales.

**8. Avoid A Loose Cannon Anywhere In The Company.** Obviously, such a person must not be tolerated by any responsible company. That individual can not only destroy the morale of the employees and create problems, but also, when contacted by customers, can create yet another major problem by destroying your relationship with the customer.

**9. Do You Have A Chronic Complainer On Your Staff With A Bad Attitude?** Believe it or not, some people are "never happy unless they are unhappy." Such people will complain chronically. Not only do these people destroy



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the morale within the company, they have the potential to significantly damage the morale and attitudes of the sales department. This problem should also not be allowed under any circumstances, at any company.

**10. Unwise Sales Compensation Program.** One of the most powerful management tools is to develop a mutually beneficial compensation program that fosters accountability on the part of the sales people.

Long ago, we had a sales person who our sales manager could not wait to be rid of, for reasons of poor performance. We changed the compensation program, and the sales person in question ranked in the top two in the entire company. In plain English, compensation programs should be results-driven and require the sales person to meet expected sales numbers while maintaining better than 95 percent of his or her customers.

**11. Lack Of Team Work.** As a sports enthusiast and former coach for Little League soccer, I have learned that nothing is more important in any organization or any sports team than team work. One of the greatest things that I have heard along these lines is "teams win, individuals lose." To promote team work, companies must provide a team goal and make sure that every individual meets his or her needed sales results; otherwise this team goal may not be met.

**12. Sales Support And Customer Care Should Be Second To None.** In today's highly demanding consumer environment, sales support and customer care is just as important as selling a great product or service. We all know people who have canceled a contract with a well-known manufacturer not because of product performance but because of lousy customer care and customer service. A situation like this qualifies as a sales prevention department because the unhappy customer is not likely to buy anything from your company if you have that kind of problem.

**13. Rudeness And Unprofessional Behavior Must be Eliminated At All Cost.** It is management's paramount responsibility to train and communicate clearly with the entire company that rudeness and unprofessional behavior, both within the company or with customers, is totally and categorically frowned upon and is not tolerated by management. We all have heard of rudeness and poor customer service reported by some offshore outsourcing companies. In my opinion, there should be no reason for such behavior.

### Focusing On The Strategic Needs Of Your Customers

In addition to avoiding the above problems, **a progressive company with savvy management must focus completely on the customer needs and customer care.** Today's customers, in

**It is management's paramount responsibility to train and communicate clearly with the entire company that rudeness and unprofessional behavior, both within the company or with customers, is totally and categorically frowned upon and is not tolerated by management.**

my opinion, are looking for the following:

**1. Better, Cheaper, Faster.** It is clearly the formula for success for any progressive company. Customers demand better, cheaper, faster products. To survive, suppliers must comply at all costs.

**2. Customers Need Competitive Advantage.** Obviously, with the highly competitive environment today, if you don't have the competitive advantage, you cannot sell your products. Customers expect their vendors to give them competitive advantage and, most important, they expect their vendors to differentiate their products from their competition.

**3. The Customer Demands All Of The Above, Yesterday.** That is, they

want it and they want it now. To prosper, you need to reinvent your company to comply with all of the requirements indicated above in order to run a successful company and avoid lost sales.

### In Conclusion

These rules were created as the result of years of experience in business. For us, these are the cardinal rules of successful business, and they should be the cardinal rules of any company. Indeed, over the years, I have personally lost a lot of money because of ignorance of the above golden rules of business, and my objective is to share them with you so you don't make the same mistakes that I have.

The bottom line is that if you want to eliminate the sales prevention department, which exists in perhaps 95 per-

cent of companies, you need to address all these problems and eliminate anything that is contributing to sales prevention in your company.

As always, I welcome your comments. Please e-mail them to me at [ntehrani@tmcnet.com](mailto:ntehrani@tmcnet.com). **CIS**

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By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

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### Onyx And CDC: Hostile CRM Takeover Averted

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

*So it looks like CDC's hostile bid for Onyx has ended with a whimper. In deciding to withdraw and terminate the tender offer, CDC's management and board cited "the remote likelihood that the conditions to the tender offer would ever be satisfied."*

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### Avaya Replaces Don Peterson

By Rich Tehrani, President and Editor-in-Chief

*Avaya has announced both a profit decrease and the replacement of Don Peterson as CEO on the same day. Louis D'Ambrosio is the new CEO. I liked Don; he was a great guy. Unfortunately, on Wall Street, how nice you are rarely matters: it is all about the bottom line.*

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## Eighteen Years Of Mergers

In May of 1998, I wrote a column in these pages entitled “Merger Fever — For Better Or For Worse.” In that column, I mentioned that at that time, one of our exhibit salespeople came to me and exclaimed, “The industry is contracting!” (<http://www.tmcnet.com/338.1>). It turns out, of course, that this salesperson was very wrong, and the call center market enjoyed decades of growth from that point forward.

As part of that 1998 article, I mentioned that the call center market was so different from the traditional software space where one size fits all. I went on to say that mergers aren't necessarily a bad thing, and there was plenty of space for well managed start-ups.

I then gave an overview of the features and functions a call center solution should offer. They were as follows:

- Predictive dialing;
- ACD;
- Call blending;

- Multimedia routing (voice, fax, video, e-mail, chat);
- Complete reporting and analysis;
- Agent performance evaluation;
- Field sales connectivity;
- Computer-telephony integration (CTI);
- Scalability;
- Platform independence;
- AIN (advanced intelligent network)/SS7 connections;
- Adherence to open standards, ODBC, SQL, COM;
- Easily customizable/programmable;
- Upgradable/No forklift upgrades;
- External and internal sales channel (VARs and in-house sales reps); and
- Simple yet powerful user and management GUIs.

**In a strange demonstration of the fact that history often repeats itself, another salesperson here at TMC recently told me the market was consolidating again. This time, though, there is more truth to this comment than in 1998.**

- Logging and monitoring;
- Help desk/customer service;
- IVR/Web self-service;
- Web callback;
- Speech recognition/text-to-speech;

To this list I would now add support for IP communications, though I suppose multimedia routing is more or less the same thing. I would go on to say that integration with other applications is more important than ever, so service-oriented architecture (SOA) will become increasingly prevalent.

In addition, there is a shift in usability coming via the advent of the widespread use of AJAX, a technology that allows browser-based applications to seem like software running locally. In

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addition, the hosted market is becoming more important; as a result, companies are wise to look at a hosted solution before they make an informed choice of what to implement in their contact centers.

In a strange demonstration of the fact that history often repeats itself, another salesperson here at TMC recently told me the market was consolidating again. This time, though, there is more truth to this comment than in 1998. Here is why.

Many companies, especially venture-backed organizations, have “exit strategies” they are looking to exploit. Initial public offering (IPO) and M&A are the two primary options that companies have.

In the last five years, the IPO market has become much more complicated and expensive. Companies must show profit — and lots of it — to effect a good IPO. In addition, the extra overhead imposed by Sarbanes-Oxley compliance has scared many companies away from going public at all.

This leaves acquisition as the best way to allow initial investors to get their money back. Couple this with the fact that the market is coming out of a very rough period during which many companies were valued far lower than the investors expected. As a result, small to medium-sized companies in the marketplace need to exit, and getting purchased is the easiest way to attain this goal.

At the same time, a few monster companies are emerging in the market: Aspect and Oracle, to name only two.

First, let's consider the former Concerto Software. Massachusetts-based Concerto went on a spending spree over a period of several years, purchasing companies such as the call center division of Rockwell, Melita and others. These companies all had one thing in common: great technology, but an array of management problems that kept them from growing effectively. By acquiring them,

Concerto got great technology at great prices. The company then went for the big catch, and merged with Aspect, becoming the entity now known as Aspect Software.

From a market share perspective, the company made some great moves, but consolidating the disparate technologies the company has assembled will take a good deal of time. Still, Aspect has become the 800-pound gorilla of the call center market.

In the CRM space, SAP has been doing a masterful job of growing through integration. SAP's CRM applications have been integrated into a suite of offerings by SAP. This strategy is working exceedingly well.

Oracle is obviously not taking this lying down, as the company has been

kets that is new. The players are becoming truly huge.

In the past, when there was consolidation in a market, a slew of new players were created from the engineers of the acquired companies. It was common practice for these engineers to get a big payoff check and then go and get funding to do something new and exciting. This is how the tech markets and other industries have worked for years.

As a result, I expect these recent mergers to be the fuel for the next generation of call center and CRM companies. Undoubtedly, we will begin to see more competition in the hosted and SMB spaces.

We seem to be in a new era of call center/CRM behemoths and some

**In the past, when there was consolidation in a market, a slew of new players were created from the engineers of the acquired companies. It was common practice for these engineers to get a big payoff check and then go and get funding to do something new and exciting.**

assembling a CRM powerhouse through acquisitions, and the latest CRM company to be picked up was Siebel.

In response to the growth of the on-demand market, Oracle also purchased Telephony@Work to integrate hosted contact center offerings with hosted CRM. Telephony@Work doesn't have to be in a hosted environment to work, but it certainly does excel in such environments, as the company's software has been powering MCI-hosted offerings for years.

The question worth asking is whether the market is indeed contracting. While I don't think it is, and the researchers are showing healthy growth ahead for CRM and call centers, there is something happening in these mar-

surrounding satellite companies of more modest size. I think this is a healthy step for any market, and liken it to leaves falling off trees in winter to be replaced by new leaves in the spring.

As you may recall, we recently marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of this publication. I hope to have a wrap-up editorial on this same topic for our next quarter-century anniversary. Hopefully you will still be reading. **CIS**

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# 2006

## 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.

#### CRM/Contact Center Software/Hardware

Amae Software



Mercom



Strategic Contact Solutions, Inc.



Aspect Software



NICE Systems



Telephony@Work



Co-Nexus, Inc.



Nortel Networks



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Sennheiser Electronic Corp.



Verint Systems



FrontRange Solutions



SER Solutions Inc.



VoiceLog LLC



IEX Corporation



Siebel Systems



Spectrum Corporation



Witness Systems



Interactive Intelligence



SIVOX



SPEECH TECHNOLOGY



Left Bank Solutions



Stratasoft, Inc.





## Teleservices Outsourcing

West Corporation



InfoCision Management Corporation



Advanced Data-Comm, Inc.



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

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

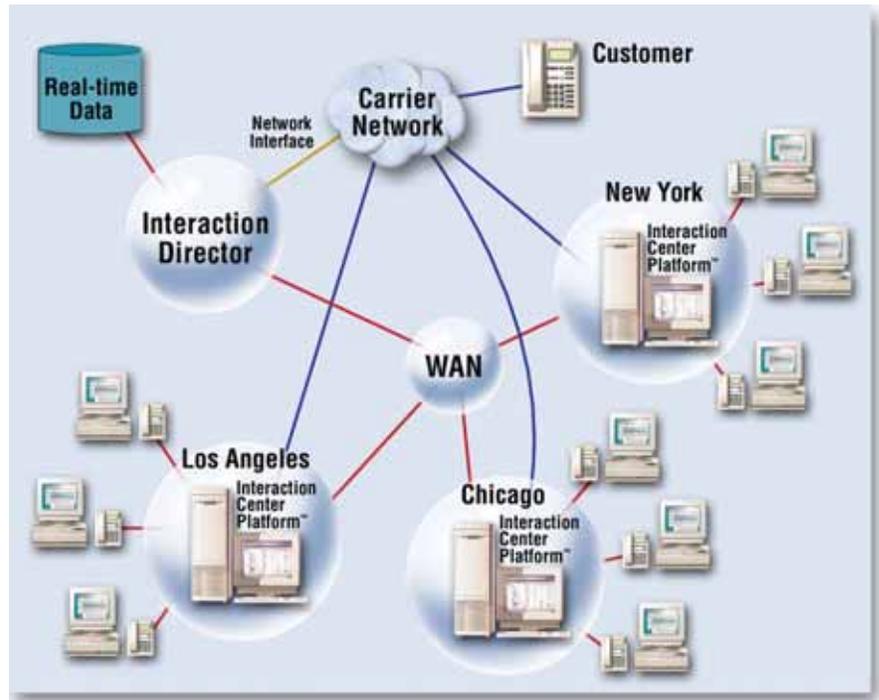
### Interactive Intelligence Releases Enhanced Multisite Call Routing Software

Interactive Intelligence Inc. ([news - alert](#)) has made available a new version of its multisite call routing software, Interaction Director, which adds “generic object routing” to enable distributed contact centers and enterprises to more effectively route and process virtually any type of work task — from customer service trouble tickets and loan applications, to catalog orders and address updates.

Interactive Intelligence customers with distributed operations were key drivers in the decision to add generic object routing, according to the company's senior vice president of worldwide marketing, Joseph A. Staples. “We already had a large number of customers using our contact center automation software's remote agent and supervisory features, so based on their feedback, the logical next step for us was to create even more effective add-on options for the virtual contact center,” Staples said.

Interaction Director was first released in 1999 as a network-based pre- and post-call routing product designed to work with the company's contact center automation software, Customer Interaction Center (CIC). Interaction Director helps organizations improve operational efficiencies by more evenly distributing calls across sites based on real-time information, such as agent availability, skill-sets and other pre-configured rules. This includes the ability to route faxes, e-mails and other multimedia interactions from ACD queues across multiple sites and groups.

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### Nortel Introduces Communications Solutions For The SMB Market

Nortel ([quote - news - alert](#)) has announced a new portfolio of voice, data and wireless products designed to help small and medium-sized businesses (SMB) boost employee productivity and satisfaction, streamline business operations and costs, and deliver improved customer service. In addition to expanding its SMB portfolio, the company is increasing its focus on programs, training and tools to support channel partners and to ultimately drive revenue in this growing market segment.

Nortel's expanded SMB portfolio brings the power of wireless LAN, Ethernet switching, security and converged voice and data to the SMB market. The portfolio will be available in August 2006 and consists of four new products that address unique requirements, challenges and budgets of smaller businesses. The new SMB portfolio also includes enhancements to Nortel's BCM.

According to a recent Nortel survey of more than 1,000 small and medium-sized businesses around the world, data networking, wireless LAN and security software and devices are the top three technologies SMBs are most likely to purchase in 2006. With the launch of the new SMB portfolio, Nortel is introducing new SMB-specific sales training and on-demand marketing tools to assist its North American channel partners. New channel programs include the SMB Connection

Partner Community, an online community established to facilitate communication between Nortel and its SMB channel partners, and Blueprints for Success, a tool developed with input from Nortel channel partners to identify best practices used when selling Nortel solutions to SMBs.

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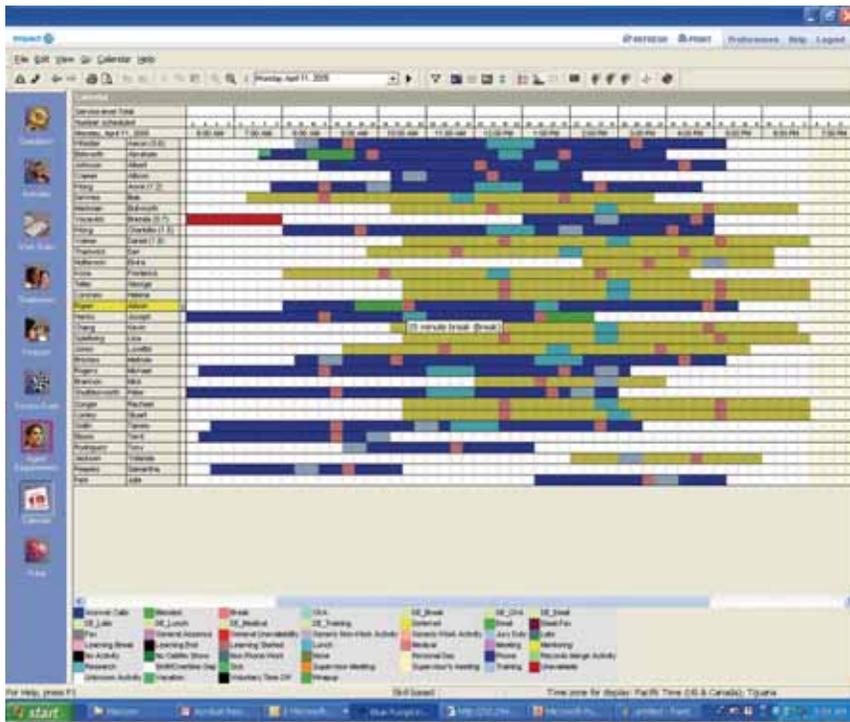
### Witness Systems Announces Enhancements To Impact 360

Witness Systems, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of workforce optimization software and services, has announced enhanced functionality to its next-generation workforce management solution. Impact 360 Workforce Management features new business integrations, along with capabilities that allow organizations to enhance scheduling, streamline management and gain efficiencies as they coordinate their in-house and outsourced contact center operations. Other additions to the software include advancements in partial shift swapping, reporting, planning and administration.

New to Impact 360 Workforce Management are features designed to help contact center management more effectively schedule and better coordinate with outsourcers. For organizations that share calls across internal and outsourced centers that may be using other workforce management solutions, making decisions with a complete picture of the workload and available resources presents a significant challenge.

For more comprehensive coordination, Impact 360 Workforce Management enables users to share the forecasted workload and/or required staffing with outsourced centers, as well as load the outsourcer's planned staffing back into Impact 360. With the added outsourcer staffing information, accurate service-level forecasts are based on a complete model that quickly identifies intervals of under- or over-staffing. Such information can then be used in a variety of planning and intra-day schedule management decisions such as the placement of meetings and training, the authorization of overtime and the decision to offer voluntary time off.

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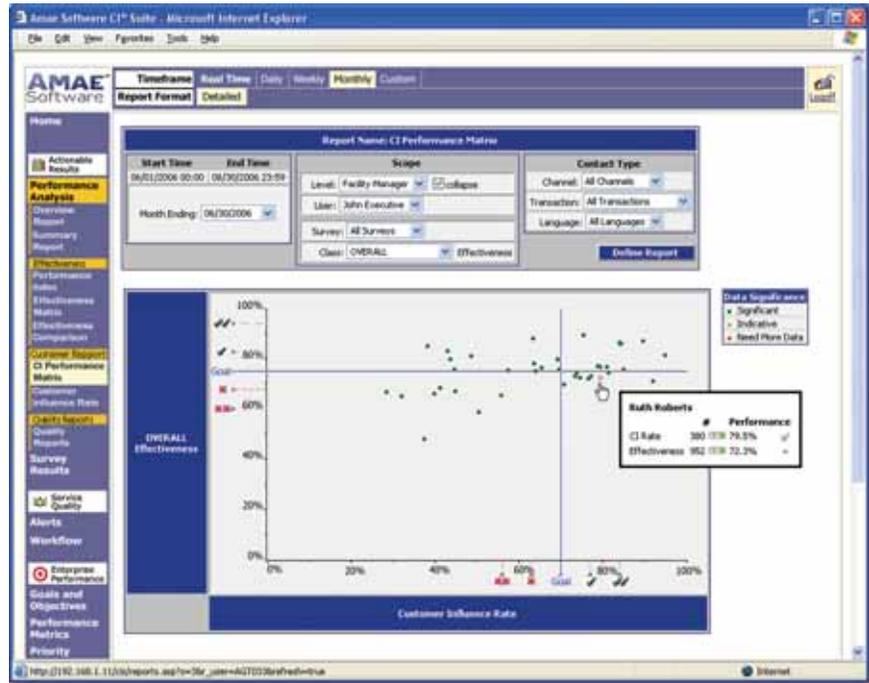
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## Amae Software Joins Solution Made Easy

Amae Software ([news - alert](#)) has announced it is joining with three other contact center industry solutions providers to extend Solution Made Easy, an integrated, modular suite of contact center solutions developed by **Voice Print**, **Syntora** and **Pipkins**. Solution Made Easy is comprised of seven components essential for workforce optimization: call recording, quality monitoring, workforce management, performance management, speech analytics, agent coaching and customer surveying. Billed by the companies involved as a “mix and match, one-stop-shop” where organizations can design their own workforce optimization solutions for their specific environment at their own pace, Solution Made Easy offers a selection of applications from which clients can choose.

“The Amae CI Suite brings customer-driven metrics and customer intelligence into the operations of your business and contact center,” said Gerald Wluka, VP of Products at Amae Software. <http://www.amaesoftware.com>



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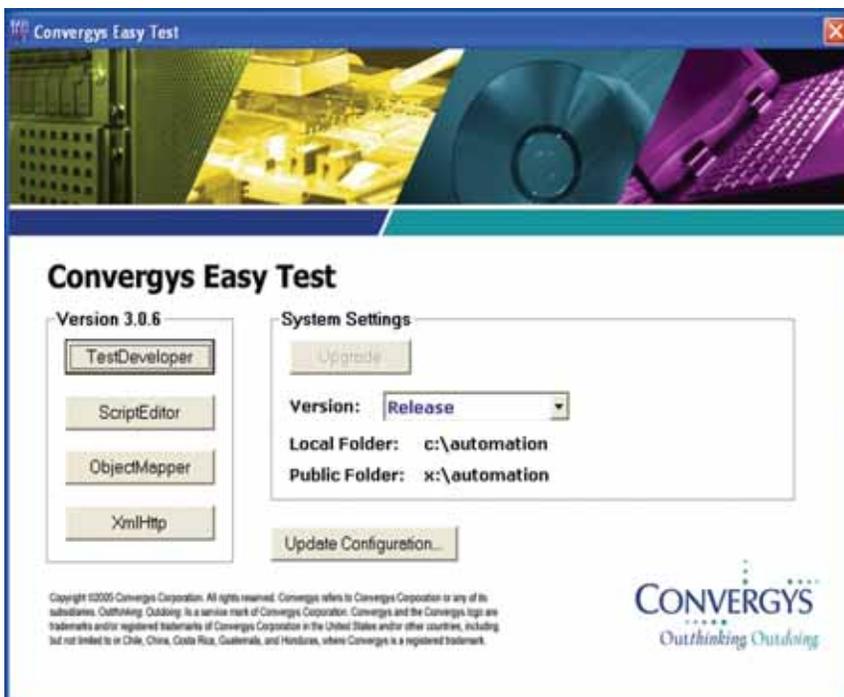
### Convergys Offering Its Testing Solution

A new suite of software testing solutions from **Convergys Corporation** ([news - alert](#)) combining consulting services with automated testing software is now available to businesses seeking to strengthen their software testing capabilities. Convergys Testing Solutions combine professional services offerings with Convergys Easy Test, an automated software application testing tool. Businesses using Convergys Testing Solutions can enhance the quality of their products and services by thoroughly testing and verifying changes to mission-critical systems such as billing and customer care.

Under a contract signed recently with Convergys, **SunCom Wireless** is using Convergys Testing Solutions to bring complex voice and data pricing plans to market quickly. Convergys is providing testing consulting services in the form of software configuration, customization, project management and system testing.

Convergys developed their suite of testing solutions to address their own needs, which according to the company were not being met by existing testing products on the marketplace. After client requests to make the solution commercially available, the company created "Convergys Testing Solutions." Convergys has said it is offering businesses the experience and expertise gained over 20 years of developing and testing complex software applications to reduce costs and improve testing quality and time-to-market.

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### BSG Clearing Acquires VoiceLog, LLC

BSG Clearing Solutions North America, LLC, ([news - alert](#)) a wholly owned subsidiary of **Billing Services Group Limited**, a telecom clearing and settlement, payment and financial risk management solutions group, has announced the acquisition of **VoiceLog, LLC's** third party verification (TPV) business. The all-cash deal values VoiceLog at US\$15.63 million and will be financed from the existing resources and facilities of the Group. The transaction closed on June 30th.

Commenting on the acquisition, Roland J. Bopp, CEO of BSG, said: "VoiceLog's third-party verification business has a great reputation in the industry and offers us considerable benefits of scale and market penetration. Their complementary services reinforce our business proposition, and for over five years, we've cultivated a relationship that makes this a very natural conclusion. I am delighted to welcome the VoiceLog team to BSG."

<http://www.bsgclearing.com>

### COPC Certifies Sutherland Global Services Chennai, India Location

Customer Operations Performance Center Inc. (COPC) has announced that the Chennai, India location of **Sutherland Global Services**, ([news - alert](#)) a global BPO firm, has earned the distinction of being the first organization in India to achieve certification for multiple services to the COPC-2000 CSP Standard Release 4.0. The COPC-2000 CSP Standard is the first and only certification process designed specifically for the needs of contact centers. As a world-class benchmark of productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness for customer contact operations, it ensures contact center excellence worldwide.

Dilip Vellodi, Chairman and CEO, Sutherland Global Services said, "We have always had a strong focus on process improvements at Sutherland. With this certification to the COPC-2000 CSP Standard, we believe we have established a best-in-class customer experience standard. The overall certification process has contributed significantly to improvement in efficiencies, forecasting and staffing and performance improvement, enabling us to better leverage our pay-for-performance model."

<http://www.suth.com>

### Melissa Data Announces Express Entry For Call Centers

Melissa Data ([news - alert](#)) has announced the release of Express Entry, a software program that allows call center and service center agents to improve the speed and accuracy of data entry. Powered by Melissa Data's CASS Certified address correction engine, Express Entry works by reducing the number of keystrokes needed to input a mailing address and then validating the completed record to U.S. Postal Service specifications. Express Entry was designed to improve data quality and boost productivity in the call center or any other place where rapid address entry is required. Using a simple template, agents enter only a ZIP Code and full or partial street address. Express Entry fills in the city name, state abbreviation and verified ZIP + 4 Code.

Express Entry can eliminate up to 39 keystrokes for each record. Once the address is standardized, the record can then be transferred to any application running in the background including a form letter, spreadsheet, database or CRM program.

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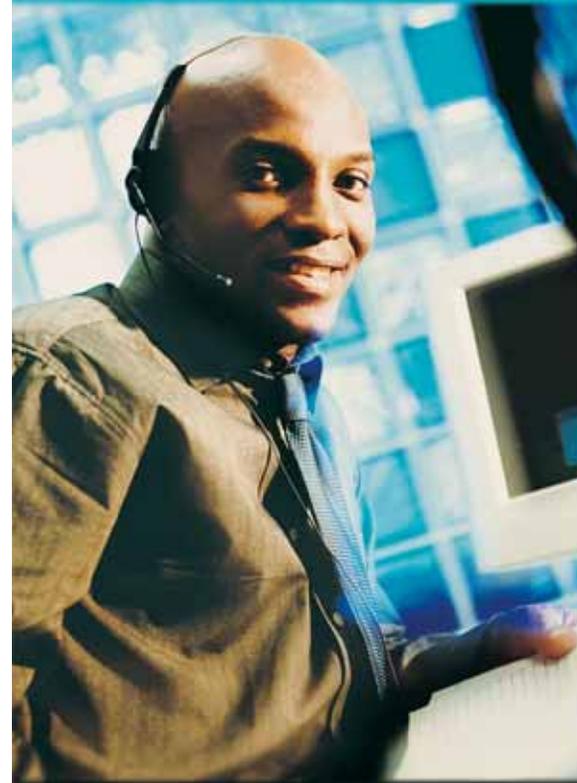
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**AnswerNet Acquires Airpage,  
Expands Into Montana**

The AnswerNet Network, ([news - alert](#)) a telemessaging provider and a contact center outsourcer, has announced it has acquired Airpage/Big Sky Beeper, a contact center, help desk, telemessaging and paging firm with operations in Billings and Helena, Montana, for an undisclosed sum. The transaction gives The AnswerNet Network additional capacity. The company now has 55 contact centers across the U.S. and Canada.

AnswerNet, which is privately owned, is growing quickly. Earlier this year it made *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine's "Top 50 Teleservices Agencies" industry ranking for the fourth straight year.

Airpage/Big Sky Beeper is now known as AnswerNet-Billings, where the local management is based. Airpage's clientele now have access to AnswerNet's full suite of capabilities. This includes additional workstations; Spanish, French and Chinese language support; product and literature fulfillment; and expertise in key areas such as business-to-business telesales.

<http://www.answernet.com>

**Aspect CEO James Foy Named Ernst & Young  
Entrepreneur Of The Year**

Aspect Software, Inc. ([news - alert](#)) has announced that Aspect CEO James D. Foy has received the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2006 award in the software category in New England. According to Ernst & Young, the award recognizes outstanding entrepreneurs who are building and leading dynamic, growing businesses. An independent panel of judges selected Foy for the award, which he accepted at an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year 20th Anniversary gala event at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel on June 15.

Within a four-year period beginning in 2001, Foy successfully led the integration of six contact center technology providers, ultimately creating Aspect Software, a contact center solutions provider with more than 30 years of cumulative experience in automatic call distribution, workforce management, predictive dialing, voice portals and multichannel contact. His entrepreneurial merger-and-acquisition strategy created the largest company in the world solely focused on delivering products and services for in-house and outsourced contact centers.

"This is a tremendous honor," said Foy. "I have had the privilege of working with many forward-thinking, dedicated and highly skilled people over the years who have helped to create a company that is technologically innovative and committed to delivering exceptional value to our customers. Aspect Software has a very bright future, and I am excited about what our customers and employees are going to accomplish together in the coming years."

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By Ozzie Fonseca

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**Nexidia Announces On Demand Solution**

Nexidia, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of audio search and speech analytics solutions for government intelligence, contact center management and Internet media, has announced the availability of its Nexidia OnDemand solution. Nexidia OnDemand is a managed service offering enabling organizations to leverage Nexidia's secure infrastructure to upload recorded audio for analysis and reporting. The intelligence gained can be easily managed and securely accessed through the Nexidia OnDemand portal.

Nexidia's solution was designed to empower businesses to experience the benefits of speech analytics by enabling rapid access to critical business intelligence from recorded audio assets and quick responses to peak demand for intelligence within the enterprise. Nexidia's scalable audio mining and speech analytics software is easy to deploy, according to the company, which also states that Nexidia OnDemand will make it even less complex by enabling users to quickly access intelligence locked away in recorded audio without mandating expensive upgrades to their recording infrastructure, additional investment in hardware or software or problematic installations on the agent desktop.  
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**Blade Kotelly**  
Director of the Design  
Collaborative for Intervoice

### Moderator



**Robert Liu**  
TMCnet Executive Editor

In a global market, service - not price - is the durable differentiator that builds loyalty, delights customers and thwarts competitive threats. Great service on every touch-point creates lasting relationships that increase market and wallet share. The more personal and consistent that experience is in both automated and assisted encounters, the better it feels to the recipient - and the more loyalty it builds for you.

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We'll kick off the series with Part 1 "Personalization: What is it?" on August 8, 2006. Here, Blade Kotelly, noted author, human factors expert and Chief User Interface Designer for Intervoice will describe the features and benefits of personalized voice automation systems. Blade will also lead Part 2 "Personalization: The Intervoice Solution" on August 15th, and demonstrate our unique approach to personalization with real and simulated before-and-after examples. Respected author, academic and call center guru, Dr. Jon Anton, will lead the final installment - Part 3 "Personalization: Why it matters & how you measure up" on August 29. Visit [www.intervoice.com](http://www.intervoice.com) for more information on upcoming webcasts.

As a bonus, 10 participants at each event will win a copy of Blade's book 'The Art and Business of Speech Recognition - Creating the Noble Voice'.

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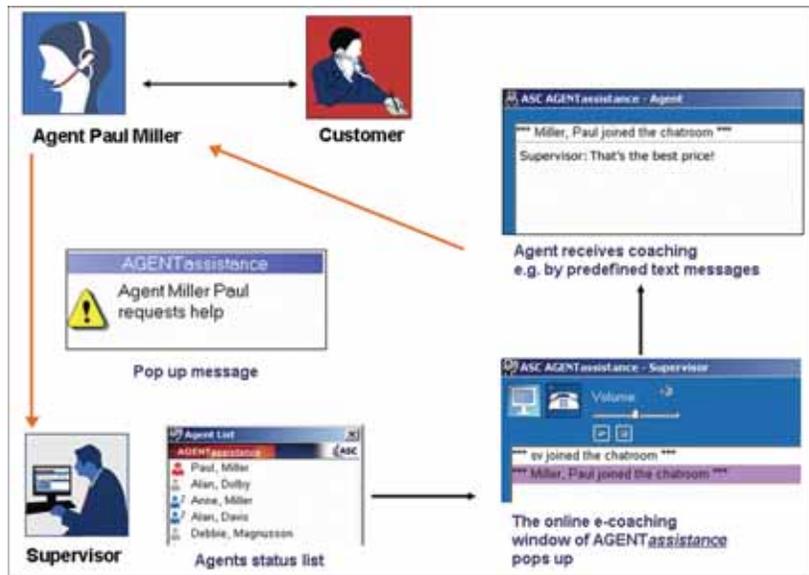
**ASC Releases New Version Of AGENT<sup>assistance</sup> Module**

ASC, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of communications recording and quality monitoring solutions for contact centers, financial institutions and public-safety and government organizations, recently announced that contact centers are able to enhance e-coaching by purchasing a new release of its AGENT<sup>assistance</sup> module, an optional supplement to the quality monitoring software, INSPIRATION<sup>pro</sup>. E-coaching refers to real-time online interactions between agents and their supervisors, especially during difficult phone calls. By providing the agent with on-the-job training through confidential communications, e-coaching achieves high quality service and increases productivity without alarming the customer about assistance from a new agent.

AGENT<sup>assistance</sup> works through agent and supervisor applications installed on their respective PCs. Supervisors monitor a list of their subordinates (e.g., online, offline, needs help). To initiate assistance, the agent clicks a special icon to send a pop-up message to his or her assigned supervisor.

Supervisors may respond through the online "e-coaching" window in several ways, including chat or predefined messages. In more extreme cases, they may initiate voice or screen monitoring or even assume control of the agent's computer and customer interaction.

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## “It’s Verint’s Intention To Be Number One In This Market”

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

Verint Systems (<http://www.verint.com>), ([news - alert](#)) a New York-based provider of analytic software-based solutions for communications interception, networked video security and enterprise business intelligence, has announced its plans to acquire New Jersey-based Mercom Systems ([news - alert](#)) (<http://www.mercom.com>), which provides recording and performance evaluation products for call centers. I recently got a chance to catch up with Mariann McDonagh, Vice President of Global Marketing for Verint, to get a little more in-depth information about the scope of the acquisition.

**TS: So tell me about this acquisition and what prompted it.**

**MM:** About three years ago, Verint entered the SMB market with our ULTRA Express solution. Basically, we repackaged our enterprise solution and shrunk it down to serve call centers with 100 seats or fewer. That business has been growing at a steady, incremental pace. When we look at that SMB market, we’re seeing that it’s our greatest opportunity right now. It’s where the fastest growth is taking place. It’s an under-penetrated market that has few solutions and a great need. We were looking for an opportunity to accelerate our growth in that market. Mercom has 6,000 implementations, most of which are in that 100 seat range across a wide spectrum of industries: financial services, utilities, consumer goods and government customers.

Mercom did a great job in building a global channel for delivery of their solutions. They have about 100 partners in North America and the Asia/Pacific region, especially Japan and Korea, with some presence in Hong Kong. In fact, Mercom has 45 percent market share in Korea right now, which is impressive.

We think it’s a great synergistic move. We have a lot happening in the enterprise — many partners such as Nortel, British Telecom, Avaya, etc. Our business mode has been 100 percent direct, so there’s no overlap between existing channels.

**TS: How are the product lines going to be combined, or are they? Is this going to become your ULTRA Express solution or something entirely different?**

**MM:** It’s early in the process, but what I can tell you is this: we’re very focused on continuing to support the Mercom channel. After all, we paid \$35 million for them. It’s important we continue to support those existing customers and that existing solution, then little by little we can begin to add some Verint capabilities to it, and grow and expand.

Right now, Mercom partners with CallMiner, since they don’t have any analytics capabilities of their own. Obviously, that’s where we’re going to be able to enhance their solution with Verint technology. Our overall objective is to provide our channel partners with a broad portfolio so they can increase their business in these markets.

**TS: Since you’re targeting the SMB market, are there any plans to offer a hosted version?**

**MM:** We’ve been working with hosted solutions for some time, and there’s a number of things afoot in development that I can’t

specifically comment on, but we do have an interest in hosted solutions. Our existing ULTRA platform is very well designed to be a multitenant hosted solution. We find that in particular, there is a lot of interest for hosted solutions in Europe, primarily because it’s a driver of the large European telecoms like British Telecom (BT).

**TS: Does Mercom have strength in any vertical markets that Verint doesn’t, perhaps creating an opportunity for Verint there?**

**MM:** Yes, actually. Mercom has clients that provide 3-1-1 services: these new citizens’ service centers. That’s something we’re excited about. We see a lot of growth in these kinds of centers, and they have the same challenges as the commercial centers. They need to know why folks are calling and how they can improve their processes.

The capabilities they continue to add to 3-1-1 services in New York are amazing — you can call and find out about restaurants, movie theaters, etc. [Editor’s note: Callers to New York’s extensive multilingual 3-1-1 service can find out about an array of subjects such as city events, alternate side parking rules, the nearest day care centers, and can report non-emergency concerns such as pot holes or the neighbor’s barking dog. The 3-1-1 center reports that it takes a remarkable amount of calls on Thanksgiving Day from people looking for advice on how to cook their turkeys.] They started out as public safety services, and now they’re branching out into a broad mix of other citizen service centers.

**TS: When do you expect the whole process to be complete?**

**MM:** We did it in a slightly unusual way. The deal was actually closed today, so it’s all finished.

**TS: What part will Mercom management play at Verint?**

**MM:** The entire management team will be joining the Verint family. We’re retaining everybody.

**TS: Will Mercom personnel work out of Verint’s Melville [New York] offices now?**

**MM:** Decisions have not really been made about that yet. Mercom has a strong development team there [in New Jersey], so for the foreseeable future, I’m sure they will remain. As for combining the teams, we think there’s going to be a great cultural match here. We’ve been working with them already, and they are very excited about joining the Verint family. In the past, the lack of a strong brand identity has been a challenge for Mercom.

**TS: So, you’ve now got analytics, performance management and recording. Are there any future plans to broaden the portfolio into a complete workforce optimization solution with features such as scheduling software or e-learning solutions?**

**MM:** One of the things that we’re excited about is that we have people who are really focused on the requirements of this market. Those determinations will be driven by build-or-buy decisions down the road. It’s Verint’s intention to be number one in this market. **CIS**



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## Innovative Solutions From \_\_\_\_\_ The Multimedia Contact Center Solutions Experts

### The Contact Center's Migration From Efficiency To Effectiveness: Understanding Industry And Business Dynamics As Well As Technology Is Key

Efficiency will never go out of style in business. But in an industry that's largely transitioned from one-dimensional call centers to e-mail, Web chat and the full-fledged multimedia contact center, making a contact center more efficient isn't enough to make it competitive.

As technology continues to empower consumers with e-services and multimedia interaction options, efficiency-driven met-

rics such as average talk times don't always gauge an agent's actual performance. Nor do they reflect the customer pulse needed to improve service levels across multiple channels or the business processes behind them. With the growing importance of multimedia agent skill sets and offering quality service no matter what media a customer chooses, the expanded role of today's contact center workforce commands far more attention than just filling seats and improving call statistics.

#### Enhancing Agent Effectiveness

Without question, a qualified agent staff is any contact center's most valuable asset. Unfortunately, with the 35 percent agent churn typical in most centers, it's also the greatest expense. Whether they look at their workforce as a benefit, an area of needed improvement or both, contact center managers are learning that putting agents in more integral roles can improve performance as well as attitudes and retention. Give agents greater incentive and better tools to help them succeed, and they take a more vested interest in the service they provide.

Contact centers across every industry are realizing they need to make agents more effective and are putting performance management at the top of the objectives list.



However, making agents better front-line ambassadors also means leveraging key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure business strengths and market opportunities across all media channels, and to optimize multichannel service processes by monitoring them with metrics for quality and satisfaction. In conjunction, contact center managers and IT chiefs are looking more closely at workforce management applications, automated satisfaction surveys and new quality monitoring tools like screen recording to supplement call recording and agent scoring.

Call the migration from efficient to effective a new trend or paradigm, if you will. We simply call it good business for any contact center. Here are some things to pinpoint in making your agents more effective and becoming a highly competitive, profit-generating value center.

### The Muddy Waters Of Acquisitions

First, two words about some of the “all-in-one” communications solutions now showing up: be careful. Given the industry’s widespread convergence-through-acquisition practices lately, the vendor waters are a bit muddy. There are many examples of this “growth through acquisition” credo in the business news recently. The rule of thumb for many vendors seems to be, “To add functionality, go buy it...and figure out how to integrate everything with the other stuff you have later.”

### True All-In-One Platforms And “Suites”

Admittedly that knock on the industry’s acquisition players is a harsh one, but only because companies like Interactive Intelligence have *always* built an all-in-one platform, as do others that don’t carry the big-name banners. They have accomplished this from the ground up because they know that in the IP telephony software space, a single architecture and integrated application suite offers a far better solution than acquired functionality.

Assessing the industry for the long term, the analysts at Gartner said it best when they concluded that “a few best-of-breed vendors will remain, but the suite providers will bear

## Metrics That Matter

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

It has never made sense to me that call centers have traditionally measured their effectiveness by metrics such as average call handle time, average wrap-time and number of calls per minute (or hour, or week). This always seemed to make as much sense to me as measuring the effectiveness of outside sales reps by presuming the one who put the most mileage on his car during the week is the highest seller and the hardest worker. In reality, it may just mean that he goes 15 miles off his route each day because he likes the coffee at Susie’s Diner better than the coffee sold by Dunkin’ Donuts.

There is no environment exempt from the laws of nature, and this includes call centers. Agents will always find a way to counteract metrics that work against them. In understaffed call centers that require agents to spend all their time on the phone with little time for recovery or proper call follow-up, agents will remain “off hook” for a few moments so they can catch their breath and/or finish typing before they take the next call. Quantity over quality means only that your call center agents will be able to irritate more customers per hour than your competitors can. Until the business world rids itself of its impression that the call center is an evil necessity once and for all, enterprise contact center solutions providers will have steep challenges before them.

Here is a good mantra for every call center: The point is not to answer as many calls and e-mails as possible. The goal should be to successfully take care of as many customer problems and inquiries as possible. By emphasizing quantity over quality, customer-facing companies are essentially sabotaging themselves. These organizations might as well be randomly deleting orders from the day’s sales at the close of each shift. Many companies go through extraordinary lengths to convince themselves that this is not the case.

More of today’s contact center solutions come with features that encourage good practices in the contact center. They have more sophisticated means of measuring metrics that matter. While certainly the brevity of the customer contact will always matter (the time a customer has to wait in call or e-mail queue is one of the most important factors in customer retention), speed should not be the primary yardstick. What many of today’s modern solutions providers try to emphasize is that by using quality management tools as a starting point in the customer contact, efficiency and speed will follow as a result. If you start with speed as your goal, the call center will continue to use the wrong yardstick throughout all its processes.

But it’s also important to remember that call centers are staffed and managed by people, not software solutions. The customer service goals, once put in place, must become the goals of every employee who touches the call center. If agents, supervisors, managers and the COO’s team have different goals, the results will be disastrous. A reader once wrote to me in response to an article on quality with the following scenario he had witnessed: a company’s operations team felt they were spending too much on the call center. To solve the problem, they issued orders that the number of calls routed to live agents must be reduced. Rather than accomplish this by beefing up the quality and usability of the company’s self-service media, the call center manager altered the IVR so that it became more difficult for callers to reach a live agent. The result? Less calls to the call center, and more money saved! That manager received a bonus for a job well done.

This is truly a lesson in self-sabotage, and it will always be the result of call center programs that focus on quantity rather than quality. And isn’t quality what you went into business to provide in the first place? **CIS**

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## Innovative Solutions From ————— The Multimedia Contact Center Solutions Experts

the bulk of the investment.” Essentially, Gartner cautioned contact centers and enterprises to listen closely whenever a vendor uses the term “suite,” as many bundled offerings now on the market actually consist of acquired components that were built using a variety of tools. As a result, these offerings are more “portfolios” than they are suites, resulting in countless system administration environments, support complexities and overlapping functionality that’s both unnecessary and costly.

In making agents and business processes more effective, contact centers should thoroughly evaluate a vendor’s platform architecture and determine their time frames for “true” suite availability. It’s best to look at a pre-integrated platform and application suite from a single vendor, which largely eliminates the complexities of acquisition-based systems.

### Three Key Effectiveness Components

**Workforce management.** WFM provides the strongest agent effectiveness building block by addressing the scheduling problems that have plagued call centers and contact centers for years. If simple math says anything about successfully handling interaction loads, it’s that a contact center must have enough agents scheduled and at their workstations every minute. Fortunately, applications such as Interactive Intelligence’s Interaction Optimizer and similar solutions help do just that. In Interaction Optimizer’s case, contact centers can accurately determine demand forecasts based on historical ACD data, develop schedules accordingly, and monitor schedule adherence across the workforce in real time, at all times.

**Quality monitoring.** Give contact center supervisors a real-time dashboard to monitor queue activity, listen in on calls, view Web chats and e-mail messages, detect problems when average thresholds are exceeded, and coach agents via whisper coaching and chat suggestions, and they’re better able to determine each agent’s effectiveness when interacting with a customer.

Also using voice and screen recording, supervisors can record agent-customer interactions to score an agent’s product

knowledge, verify how the agent answers customer inquiries and much more. Screen recording is especially useful in that supervisors can instantly capture the activity of agents handling Web chats and e-mail as well as calls, while getting a synchronized playback of audio and workstation activity for more complete quality monitoring.

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**Metrics for performance management and measurement.** Performance management leverages key performance indicators to measure strengths and market opportunities in a particular business segment. Contact centers can use KPI-related tools such as recording-based agent scoring questionnaires to analyze metrics and improve service level quality — along with associated business processes — across customer touch points (telephone, e-mail or a Web site).

Donna Fluss, Principal of DMG Consulting LLC, referred to quality metrics in her article “Quality Metrics For The Contact Center” (searchCRM.com, October 28, 2005). She said, “In any operating area of a contact center, the primary goal is to generate revenue...However, productivity, quality and customer satisfaction matter as well.”

For calls and e-mail (and reasonably for Web chats), Fluss cites metrics for efficien-

cy such as the percentage of calls answered in 20 seconds, average talk time, number of e-mail messages handled and average time to respond to e-mail. But she also cites other factors that target an agent’s effectiveness, such as first-contact resolutions, the number of upsell/cross-sell opportunities, leads identified and the accuracy of orders. For actual call and e-mail QM metrics, Fluss groups an agent’s scores for product knowledge, technical knowledge, communications skills and problem-solving skills, followed by satisfaction metrics based on incremental real-time surveys of customers as well as field sales staff and partners/distributors.

There is no mention of automated online surveys in Fluss’s article, but many contact center platforms are making them both easy and cost-effective with speech-enabled IVR applications, Web-based online forms completion and automated post-call surveys built in to outbound predictive dialing campaigns.

Whereas efficiency still matters in a contact center, the overall effectiveness of agents and the processes they utilize to serve customers have taken center stage. We’ll talk more about the move from efficiency to effectiveness in coming issues, but for now these pointers should give your contact center a good start on its migration. The sooner the better!

*Joseph A. Staples is Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing for Interactive Intelligence Inc., a global developer of software for contact centers and the enterprise since 1994. The single platform architecture and IP contact center application suite from Interactive Intelligence has long provided out-of-the-box functionality for agent performance and effectiveness in organizations worldwide. Contact [Interactive Intelligence \(news - alert\)](mailto:InteractiveIntelligence@news-alert.com) at 317-872-3000 or visit <http://www.inin.com>.*

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# The Multichannel Revolution:

## How Retailers Are Leveraging Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) To Transform Their Businesses

A new breed of e-commerce platform has emerged with service-oriented architecture (SOA). SOA not only provides a robust foundation for the Web channel, but can facilitate cross-channel customer interactions and bring the power of the Web to other sales channels. Multichannel integration has become the new retail imperative. Retailers can no longer make technology investments solely focused on improving business in a single channel. To stay competitive, retailers must now invest in creating synergy across all channels. What most retailers are missing is technology that can orchestrate the participation of disparate systems in these multichannel business processes. SOA is the next generation of e-commerce.

Today retailers are challenged to become more customer-centric while continuing to manage increasing labor and value-chain costs. Legacy information infrastructure does not have the ability to provide the information retailers need to respond to these challenges. To address these issues, businesses must begin to manage information as a strategic asset, freeing it from its repository, process and application silos and actively delivering it in-line and in-context across the extended enterprise. This is the essence of an SOA.

With online sales continuing to grow at double-digit rates, and with the Internet influencing at least 20 percent of sales in other channels ("The State of Retailing Online," Shop.Org and Forrester Research, May 2005), companies big and small now recognize e-commerce as a strategic priority. Savvy retailers realize that e-commerce is more than an online shopping cart; it's an integral part of their overall business strategy. It's no longer just about doing new business in a single channel; it's about doing business *better* — in *all* channels. Unfortunately, many retailers are left with aging e-commerce technologies they put in place during the dot.com

boom, preventing them from realizing the far-reaching potential of e-commerce. Applications aimed at operating a single, isolated channel are preventing retailers from addressing the significant challenges and opportunities that doing business in multiple channels present. Some of the trends motivating retailers to revamp their e-commerce strategies and technologies include:

***E-commerce is mainstream.*** Adoption of broadband connectivity by consumers has made the Web a pervasive influence in most people's lives. The majority of U.S. households now shop online. About 75 percent of the 175 million U.S. Internet users are online shoppers, and 61 percent have actually purchased online ("Online Consumer Selling: A Multi-Channel Perspective," eMarketer, February 2005). But despite the popularity of online shopping, Web sales still account for only about 7.7 percent of total retail sales. So why is the online channel so important? Because of the significant and growing influence it is having on sales in other channels. One study

found that for every dollar spent with a retailer online, consumers were influenced to spend an additional six dollars with that same retailer offline. In fact, retailers report that one in five offline sales are influenced by the Web ("The State of Retailing Online," Shop.Org and Forrester Research, May 2005). Retailers whose bricks and clicks are not completely integrated will struggle to gain their share of this offline revenue.

***Consumers are king*** Consumers have grown accustomed to the always-on nature of the Web and have already experienced what technology-savvy retailers can do for them. They now demand to do business on their terms — whenever, wherever and however they want. Their loyalty is hard won and harder kept. It is no longer sufficient to offer them an online catalog for placing orders; retailers must now provide a convenient, enjoyable and informative experience at every touch point. As more consumers gain experience online, they are demanding that their in-store experience give them the same benefits they enjoy on the Web — more information, more fulfillment options and more control, which are the kind of opportunities that kiosks, self-checkout and connected

By Sandy Carter  
IBM



sales associates can provide. In addition, whether customers are shopping online, from a catalog via phone, or in a store, they expect consistent, first-rate customer service before, during and after the sale. If any of these areas fall short (for example, a call center rep does not recognize a Web customer), the retailer risks losing both the sale and the customer to a competitor.

***The single channel retailer is no more.*** Today, only about 13 percent of retailers operate in only one channel — for good reason. A Forrester study found that 65 percent of shoppers researched online before making an offline purchase (“Getting Multichannel Retailing Right,” Forrester, December 2004). Another study by the Usability Sciences Corporation puts that number at 86 percent. Cross-channel shoppers (customers who use more than one channel such as store, Web and catalog) have been found to be the most valuable customers. They are younger, wealthier, extremely qualified buyers who enter stores informed and ready to purchase. Once there, they spend an average of \$154 on additional items (“The US Consumer 2004: Multichannel And In-Store Technology,” Forrester, September

20, 2004). Outdoor equipment seller REI found that people who buy from two channels, such as in-store and online, outspend single channel shoppers by 114 percent, and three-channel shoppers outspend these single-channel consumers by 167 percent.

Additionally, an alarming 50 percent of cross-channel customers switch brands when they cross channels — for example, researching from one retailer online and buying from another in-store (“Multichannel Retailing Best Practices,” Forrester, September 15, 2004). Channel silos lead to fragmented customer data and experiences that increase the likelihood this cross-channel defection will take place.

#### How Are Retailers Investing To Meet Multichannel Demands And Opportunities?

Multichannel retailers are exploring best practices in the following areas:

##### ***Putting consumers in the driver’s seat.***

Best practice retailers let customers shop when, where and how they want. Shoppers can place an order online, change the order through a call center agent and check the status of the order during a visit to the retail store.

Customers can pick up online orders at the retail store, where they may purchase additional items. Customers can return products to the retail store, even if they ordered the products online or through the call center. Best practice multichannel retailers use centralized product information management technology to ensure consistent brand, product, price and promotional information across channels.

***Building on the strengths of each channel.*** Best practice retailers take advantage of what each channel does best to improve results in the others. For example, retailers are equipping their store personnel with Web-enabled devices to better serve in-store shoppers. Many retailers provide guided selling tools or even live assistance to consumers on their Web sites. Others provide Web-based interfaces for their call center representatives. Additionally, to take advantage of the insights into customer behavior the Internet can provide, retailers are using Web analytics to tune marketing and merchandizing activity across all channels.

***Keeping their best customers — and winning more of their business.*** Best practice retailers focus on engaging and

staying engaged with the biggest spenders: multichannel shoppers. Companies are finding innovative ways to improve the customer experience and to motivate shoppers to visit other channels after a transaction is complete as a way of capturing additional sales from

these shoppers. These retailers offer cross-channel loyalty programs that allow shoppers to earn points in one channel and redeem them in the others. Personalized offers and Web pages, e-mail campaigns, cross-channel coupons and promotions can keep dialog flowing

with valuable customers. All of this requires a unified view of customer data as well as a way to sustain a consistent, ongoing dialog with the customer across channels.

**Streamlining operations.** Best practice retailers are breaking down the walls that exist between channels, integrating processes and systems to achieve a seamless cross-channel customer experience and reduce operational costs. They are establishing a single view of the customer regardless of the channels they use. They are also establishing a single, synchronized view of product information across POS, Web, kiosk, catalog, etc. These retailers seamlessly integrate cross-channel order management and fulfillment processes, and they enable inventory for any channel to be viewed from any other touch point in near real time.

To implement these best practices and begin reaping the significant rewards of true multichannel retailing, companies must make wise technology investments. Many retailers are finding themselves hampered by fragmented customer data, inflexible IT systems and applications that are operating in isolation. But ripping out and replacing the entire infrastructure to create an integrated multichannel environment is just not feasible. Retailers need to leverage the store and back-end infrastructure they have in place, enhancing it with Web-enabled technologies and defining multichannel business processes that map out key integration points.

A next-generation e-commerce platform with an SOA can help synchronize the processes and data that are required to support seamless, cross-channel operations. The right e-commerce platform can help transform a business with multiple channels into a truly integrated, multichannel business. Next-generation e-commerce is not just about a better Web site, it's about better retail. **CIS**

*Sandy Carter is VP WebSphere Marketing, Strategy and Channels at IBM (quote - news - alert) (<http://www.ibm.com>).*



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# Trapped In Chronic Push-Pull Struggles? Bridge Opposing Internal Forces With Predictive Analytics

In the fight for higher profits, battles with competitors and industry forces may not be the only obstacles facing companies today. Internal tugs-of-war between departments and business goals could be working against the best-laid profit-building plans. For example, in a typical conflict scenario, a customer acquisition department might be working overtime to attract new customers. At the same time, a collections department is working hard to collect outstanding debt but, in the process, is creating a certain level of customer attrition. Another common example of conflict fallout is the attrition that occurs when the marketing department's carefully crafted retention promos are pitched to every customer. Some customers will welcome the upsell and cross-sell offers, while other customers will become annoyed by what they view as "sales pressure."

In fact, customer contact centers are often ground zero for many of today's most common internal push-pull conflicts. The good news is that intelligent, proactive customer analytics tools can bridge the divide between opposing forces. These tools can help contact centers achieve four dual-purposed goals:

- Execute effective retention programs and lower resource costs;
- Maintain customer contact strategies and optimize workforce schedules;
- Target new customers in non-prime markets and lower the risk of these acquisitions; and
- Achieve both marketing's customer retention objectives and the collections department's collections objectives.

## Retention Objectives Versus Resource Costs

Does your company wish to retain more high-value customers, but at the same time struggles to achieve this goal due to budget limitations? Every company today knows that retaining existing customers is more profitable than spending resources to acquire new cus-

tomers. Yet, in the name of cost savings, many organizations forego proactive retention programs. This is a high-risk decision that can result in missed opportunities to keep your best customers loyal long into the future.

Instead of compromising their customer retention objectives to save money, companies can launch proactive retention programs and maintain their budgets — using intelligent predictive analytics. The secret to achieving this ideal situation is to perform proactive retention activities on high-value customers only. This strategy saves companies the high cost of indiscriminately executing retention actions with every customer, including those who offer no long-term loyalty or value. What's more, it focuses precious energy and resources where they will make the biggest impact — on customers who will continue to contribute to the bottom line long into the future, by re-

purchasing their current products and additional product lines.

Contact centers can easily focus their retention efforts on their high-value customers by deploying predictive analytic applications specifically designed for this mission. The secret lies in the applications' ability to use existing customer data to both pinpoint each customer's long-term value to the company and discover how each customer will respond to specific retention efforts.

For example, will an upsell offer to high-value customer Bob increase his customer loyalty or aggravate him? Should you let high-value customer Susan complete her inbound self-service over the phone to check her bank balance, or should you pre-empt the call and make an upsell offer? With the right answers to critical retention questions, contact centers can take the right action at the right time with every customer. This practice will give companies a fighting chance against aggressive competitors, volatile market changes, fickle customers and their own internal struggles.

By Robert Tate  
Austin Logistics



### Contact Strategies Versus Workforce Constraints

What's the first sign that a call center's agents aren't busy? They start popping their heads above their cubicles, which call center managers call "groundhogging." At this point, the managers scramble to find something cost-producing to fill the agents' valuable time, fully aware that the clock is ticking and profitability is dropping every second.

The problem of keeping agents' workload optimized is so pervasive that entire software programs are employed to overcome the problem. However, these workforce management applications often compound the problem by analyzing call centers' historic workloads to estimate their future work requirements. This back-to-front workforce projection frequently requires call centers to force-fit their staffs to the workload estimates. The result can be less than optimal.

Predictive analytics solutions approach the problem from a different angle. Instead of creating impractical theoretical agent schedules, these solutions work with each day's actual available staffing levels — not just in one call center, but also in multiple call centers. The applications then create practical schedules in real-time, achieving the ideal balance of workload to actual agent resource across an entire business day. By working with the staff at hand, contact centers no longer have to throw their carefully planned customer contact strategies out the window when agent resources are low, because predictive analytics will make sure high impact contacts are made first.

### Good Versus Bad Account Acquisition

Is your company one of the many businesses focusing attention on customer acquisition in today's non-prime

markets? If so, you already know that the current state of the unsecured credit industry is not a pretty picture. But competitive pressures are heating up, forcing companies to make a move into these uncharted waters in the hope of achieving two fundamental business goals: attracting new customers and building the balances of the new accounts, hoping they won't become delinquent.

But the downside of this risky subprime marketing is steep, because an estimated 50 million Americans have thin or no credit files with the major credit reporting agencies. While many companies are extremely savvy when marketing to traditional prime-market customers, marketing to non-prime customers is a very different situation. To attract prime customers, companies create multilevel marketing strategies that are finely tuned to segment customers

with pinpoint precision, allowing the companies to expand business opportunities with “good” customers and limit exposure to “bad” customers. Companies confidently deploy these marketing programs every day knowing that the bottom-line result will be higher profits.

However, these companies’ sophisticated marketing tactics are diminished when marketing into non-prime markets. Here, companies must wait six months or longer to offer new customers business-building offers such as credit limit increases and upselling. The reason for this delay hinges on one archaic business process: today’s six-month behavior scoring process. Until a half-year has passed, companies cannot gain the insight they need to accurately gauge a new customer’s risk-and-reward level. While this wait does not compromise business growth in markets where the majority of the customers are good risks, it does significantly jeopardize business opportunities in non-prime markets.

The key to changing this picture from high risk to great opportunity lies in two groundbreaking studies conducted at two of the nation’s largest credit card organizations. Research found that “bad” accounts tended to build their balances to 80 percent of their limit within 30 days, while “good” accounts charged only 20 percent of their available credit in the first month. This new insight leads to one conclusion: the traditional six-month wait for behavior scores is unacceptable. What’s needed? A predictive analytics technology that identifies risk propensity on day one of new account activity.

### Marketing Goals Versus Collections Goals

Does the following classic front-end and back-end business struggle sound familiar? The marketing department works hard to gain new customers, plying them with enticing offers and seductive upsell programs. But if those customers ever enter collections, even if it’s only one time, the proverbial honey-

moon is over. Your collections department will naturally go after the outstanding debt without discrimination between customer types.

Collection agents are often tasked with the relentless pursuit of outstanding debt without regard for each customer’s individual situation. However, not every customer in collections is a deadbeat. Even good customers can miss a payment now and then. When they do, the last thing you want to do is hassle them for payment. An aggressive collection strategy could quickly turn a high-value customer into an ex-customer.

Though it may sound contrary to the mission of collections, many good customers should not be contacted at all, because they will probably pay the debt. But how do you know which delinquent customers should receive this special collection treatment?

Predictive analytics solutions are able to help collections departments separate typical low-value collections accounts from high-value customers. Plus, these technologies can take the next step to determine if these accounts should be contacted at all and, if so, determine the best course of action. Using a sophisticated collections approach eliminates the cross-purposes of marketing and collections.

Many companies are taking advantage of these collections solutions to fine-tune and elevate their collections departments into retention support systems. As all collection executives know, even incremental improvements in processes can have an immense impact on companies’ bottom lines

By reducing unnecessary customer contacts and more strategically targeting necessary contacts, companies can expect to lower costs, increase collections and boost customer satisfaction.

### Predicting The Future Of Customer Contact

The bottom line on internal conflicts in the customer contact center is that companies can no longer make the

**Though it may sound contrary to the mission of collections, many good customers should not be contacted at all, because they will probably pay the debt.**

most profitable customer decisions without insight that bridges the conflicts and achieves the optimum result under all circumstances. Thanks to intelligent predictive analytics solutions, companies are gaining clearer customer insight and making better decisions. Progressive market players have found that they can make their best decisions — i.e., decisions that ensure the highest profitability from every customer interaction — by adding predictive analytics to their traditional decision support systems. These early adopters are reaping the rewards of predictive analytics, including greater insight, smarter decisions, higher returns and faster payback.

Predictive applications can deliver harmonious results, because they have the unique capacity to simultaneously process new areas of existing corporate and customer data including the company’s strategic business goals, the actual resources available, the needs of the entire account base and the propensity rankings of each individual account. The result is true action optimization — all day, every day. **CIS**

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# The Annual Headset Roundup

It's no secret that headsets can lead to headaches for call centers (perhaps both literally and figuratively). When it comes to this vital piece of equipment, there are many options and factors to consider. There are wireless headsets, corded over-the-head headsets, corded over-the-ear headsets, cordless phone headsets and VoIP headsets. There are headsets for MP3 players, cellular phones, PC and video games, PDAs, airline pilots, musicians, astronauts and NASA mission-control engineers. For each of these uses, there are both different and similar requirements and preferences.

In the telecommunications domain, however, headsets have specific abilities required across the spectrum of small, large and home offices, and enterprises and call centers of all sizes. No longer foreign attachments or alien appendages, these headsets are required contributors to the quality of the call center and enterprise; they should allow users to communicate with others, and they should do so clearly, distinctly and comfortably.

They should offer the best that headset technology provides, and they should be made to last. They should be comfortable, versatile, compatible, cost-effective, reliable and, yes, perhaps even attractive. Above all, they

should do exactly what you want for exactly the price you're willing to spend (if not more for that price).

It's important to note that poor productivity in the call center or enterprise isn't always a staffing problem or a system problem. The fault can lie in the staff's equipment, and headsets are a significant contributory piece of equipment, which makes them no mere luxuries — rather, they can be genuine cost savers. They can cancel out background noise, shaving precious minutes off calls and improving the customer experience. They can protect the agents' ears from spikes in noise (called "acoustic shock"), they can be highly adjustable so multiple agents can comfortably wear the same headset. They can allow managers and supervisors to roam among their teams while remaining connected to the call center. They can be durable and resist expensive breakage and return/replacement scenarios. Finally, they can be made to fit well for maximum comfort and voice quality.

The following organizations either manufacture or resell (where indicated) headset products. We urge you to contact these companies' Web sites for more information.

**Ahern Communications** (reseller)  
<http://www.aherncorp.com>  
<http://www.callcenterheadsets.com>  
 800-451-5067

**Alltel CPI** (reseller)  
<http://www.alltelcpi.com>  
 800-525-5835

**Big D Communications** (reseller)  
<http://www.bigdcom.com>  
 800-444-5217

**Black Box Network Services** (reseller)  
<http://www.blackbox.com>  
 602-273-6400

**CommuniTech** (reseller)  
<http://www.communitech.com>  
 888-795-7222

**Danacom** (owned by Sennheiser Communications)  
<http://www.danacom.dk>  
 877-736-6434

**Dowumi Corp.**  
 (under the Voniam brand)  
<http://www.dowumi.com>  
 630-629-1897

**eMicrophones, Inc.** (reseller)/  
**SpeechControl.com** (reseller)  
<http://www.emicrophones.com>  
<http://www.speechcontrol.com>  
 914-556-8286

**Founder's Telecom** (reseller)  
<http://www.founderstelecom.com>  
 800-333-0020 or 512-858-9677

**GBH Communications** (reseller)  
<http://www.gbh.com>  
 800-222-5424/818-246-9900

**Global Teck Worldwide** (reseller)  
<http://www.global-teck.com>  
 703-766-6363

**GN Netcom**  
 (a GN Great Nordic company)  
<http://www.gnnetcom.com>  
 800-826-4656

**Headset Discounters** (reseller)  
<http://www.headsetdiscounters.com>  
 800-440-7639

**HeadsetExperts.com** (reseller)  
<http://www.headsetexperts.com>  
 800-641-6416

**Headset Innovations** (reseller)  
<http://www.headsetinnovations.com>  
 800-820-1744

**Headset Zone** (reseller)  
<http://www.headsetzone.com>  
 800-533-4014

**Headsets.com** (reseller)  
<http://www.headsets.com>  
 800-432-3738

**Hello Direct** (part of the GN Netcom/GN Great Nordic family)  
<http://www.hellodirect.com>  
 800-435-5634

**JABRA Corporation** (part of the GN Netcom/GN Great Nordic family)  
<http://www.jabra.com>  
 630-442-6900

**Phonemaster Communications, Inc.**  
 (reseller)  
<http://www.etelephonesystems.com>  
 800-339-4588

**PhoneMerchants** (reseller)  
<http://www.phonemerchants.com>  
 877-291-1076

**The Phone Source** (reseller)  
<http://www.thephonesource.com>  
 866-397-3351

**Plantronics**  
<http://www.plantronics.com>  
 800-544-4660/831-426-5858

**Pro Tech Communications, Inc.**  
<http://www.protechcommunications.com>  
 772-464-5100

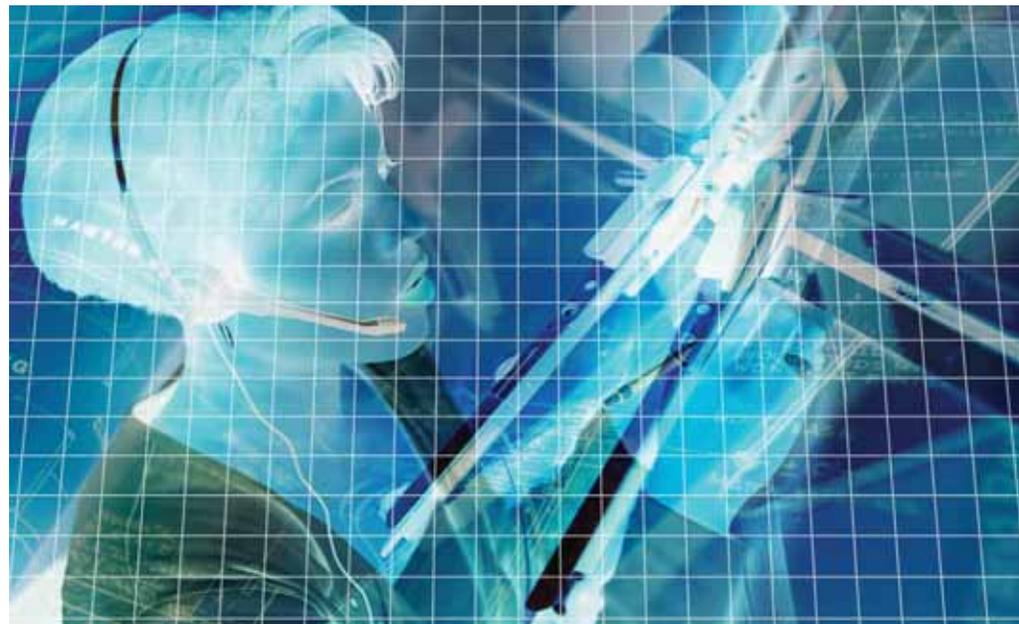
**Sennheiser Communications**  
<http://www.sennheisercommunications.us>  
 860-434-9190

**Tape-Tel Electronics** (reseller)  
<http://www.tapetel.com>  
 800-228-1751

**TWAcomm.com, Inc.** (reseller)  
<http://www.twacomm.com>  
 877-892-2666

**VXI Corporation, Inc.**  
<http://www.vxicorp.com>  
 800-742-8588

**Windows to Technology Ltd.**  
 (reseller)  
<http://www.win2tech.com>  
 613-961-1571/800-964-8810



# Return on Investment: The Advantages Of Quality Headsets

Headsets are the single most important link between consumers and businesses. Most consumer-oriented companies rely on contact centers to handle high volumes of customer inquiries, and contact centers must therefore thrive on efficiency. High-quality headsets streamline endless phone calls to quick, effective transactions by cutting down on any wasted time spent repeating information or fiddling with headset adjustments. When businesses invest in premium headsets for each agent in their contact centers, the benefits are quickly realized.

Sound quality is the most important feature of a good headset, and must be satisfactory on both ends of the call. Customers will become frustrated if they can hear the bustle of the contact center more clearly than the agent, and worse, if the agent's voice comes through the call with all of the crackles and pops of a poor microphone. Agents will also become aggravated when they cannot hear the caller and are forced to ask the customer to repeat information. The agent may be forced to take a hand off the keyboard to reposition the headset or make any other adjustment, which increases the length of the call and contributes to input errors. Better headsets eliminate these problems. A proper noise-canceling microphone eliminates the sounds of agents sitting in the next cubicle; the only sound the customer will hear is the clarity of the agent's voice. The transaction will then take place quickly and seamlessly.

It is important to consider how beneficial quality headsets can be to a company. For example, a call may span the length of a minute when the agent is using a poor-quality headset, since information may need to be repeated. With a high-quality headset, the need to

repeat information is reduced, shaving valuable seconds off the call. Imagine this: if 500 contact center employees begin using sufficient headsets, valuable seconds are reclaimed, translating into thousands of minutes and hundreds of hours of efficiency. From here, it's not hard to determine out how those saved work hours can lead to thousands of dollars in savings that otherwise would have gone toward hourly wages. It becomes easy to see how the benefits of a high-quality headset can lead to a return on investment.

Another important (not to mention economical) consideration is safety. Sometimes, contact center agents may experience what is known as acoustic shock syndrome, which is caused by unexpected noise "bursts" that may impair hearing. This syndrome results from headsets that do not protect users from spikes in sound. Some headsets on the market today automatically and effectively adjust levels in reaction to unexpected acoustic bursts — a feature that protects the user's hearing. Lower

quality headsets may not have this feature at all, or they may have limited capacity to absorb more than one acoustic burst, potentially exposing the employee to harmful spikes of noise. Instead of dreading each call for fear of experiencing pain, individuals using high-quality headsets with this feature can answer each call with confidence that their ears are safeguarded. This protection reduces liability from worker's compensation issues and makes the task of speaking on the phone day in and day out enjoyable and more relaxing for the workforce.

Lesser quality headsets may not only be painful, but are often uncomfortable and unreliable. Flimsy headsets simply do not withstand the wear and tear from normal, day-to-day use, especially if the same headsets are used by multiple employees in rotating shifts. Users may not be able to fix the boom microphone or headband to a comfortable position, or worse, cords could become dislodged and cut off sound. This reduces the morale of workers and cuts down on productivity, since uncomfortable agents are not able to fully focus on their tasks at hand. If headsets are continually breaking, contact center man-

By Eric Palonen and Rachel Vaclavik  
Sennheiser Communications



agers must spend valuable time replacing the parts or even the whole set, which will temporarily eliminate that workstation until the problem is fixed. With better headsets, managers can devote all their time to training and assisting employees, and reduce time spent on the administrative tasks associated with replacing broken headsets.

One of the most important issues contact centers must address is changing technology. Companies are continually searching for new, high-tech ways to conduct business. With older, less expensive headset models, companies may need to invest in interface boxes to connect the headsets to various phone models, or they may even need to order a whole new set. Technological advances in headsets may eliminate the need for amplifier boxes completely.

Sennheiser Communications devel-

oped a line of headsets that are easy to upgrade and integrate into new systems; most can even directly connect to nearly all phone systems, eliminating the extra need for interface boxes, which can cost up to \$120 per headset. With the boom in popularity of broadband phone services such as Vonage and Skype, the technological future for contact centers is uncertain. Landlines may be eliminated from some contact centers in favor of this new technology. If this happens, headsets will become even more important if they can adapt to changes with an inexpensive cord.

Similarly, the array of accessories offered with each headset is equally as important in the struggle to keep up with changing technology. Quality accessories allow users to customize the headset to their personal preferences, as well as integrate the headset with differ-

ent systems and technology. The benefit of a high-quality headset reaches far beyond the simple dollar value of the initial purchase price. The morale of the contact center workforce may be boosted because employees are more comfortable, customers and employees can enjoy shorter calls and less time waiting in a queue for a representative and, ultimately, companies can conserve their financial resources for other areas of their business. A headset is the final link between your customer and your company, and deserves careful review to ensure that you are getting the maximum return on investment in both the short and long term. **CIS**

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# Contact Center Virtualization: Requirements For Effective Team Supervision And Quality Management

Today, rather than having a legacy environment — where contact centers tend to be a single physical site — contact centers are turning to voice over IP technology to break down geographical barriers and tie communications together across the enterprise. [VoIP \(define - news - alert\)](#) enables new work paradigms because VoIP lifts geography as a barrier to effective communications, enabling successful “virtual” contact centers and “homeshoring.” For contact centers, the opportunities are:

- The ability to hire, train and keep qualified employees regardless of location;
- More flexible staffing, including part-time, peak-time and follow-the-sun;
- The opportunity to invoke remote staff at peak times to ensure service levels for high-value calls, which drives an increase in revenue; and
- The addition of call center agents without adding facilities costs.

There's no question that customer interaction is going “virtual.” When we think of virtualization, we tend to think of a workforce at home. In reality, virtualization happens when independent locations or bodies of resources operate together as part of a cohesive customer interaction network, including:

- Home agents;
- Smaller, regional call centers;
- Branch offices or store locations;
- Knowledge workers at corporate headquarters or anywhere else; and
- Outsourced contact centers at any location.

Through virtualization, customer inquiries can be handled by a trained call center agent in any remote location to

provide a more flexible resource for meeting service levels. In hiring conscientious, qualified agents, location is no longer a factor. This increases customer service quality, as customers dialing a local number feel like they're getting localized or specialized service and/or their call is automatically transferred and handled by the most appropriate agent.

Virtualization isn't just about the location of people. It requires that contact center tools are available to any team member on the network, not just those at the main contact center. In some cases, it drives requirements for new tools as well as a new architecture. For example, agent team members must now have a way to know the skills and availability of virtual team members, and it becomes impossible for agents to simply raise their hands and say they need help from a supervisor if they are working at some other location. Once agents, supervisors and managers are distributed across the enterprise, traditional supervisory and quality control

management techniques become either impractical or difficult to adapt and scale with the enterprise. As a result, team supervision and quality management in a virtual environment requires a new approach.

With [VoIP \(define - news - alert\)](#) the physical location of the agent — large call center, remote location, home location or foreign call center — can become completely invisible to the customer. This requires precise planning and design from location to location and person to person. It's also important to consider that the service levels can vary drastically if the team management process and technology is not built to support virtualization. Some of the underlying challenges are a lack of planning around best practices and tools for managing virtual teams to ensure quality and adherence to key metrics; and applications that don't allow the network to be truly “virtualized” so the cost levels can be reduced while providing better service.

Successfully addressing these questions enables the technology and training resources to enhance the customer experience and brand with consistent service and value.

By Gerry Johnsen  
Spanlink Communications



## Best Practices And Tools For Managing Virtual Teams

Virtual contact centers must support team productivity regardless of location — whether agents are in a call center, at home, or at a retail store location. The best contact centers handle calls by using agent desktops that include access to enterprise applications, Web services and other productivity-enhancing tools. These tools become even more critical in virtual centers, where best practices must be enforced across distance. Agent productivity and team management tools built in service-oriented architecture (SOA) will boost virtual agents' efficiency by providing ready access to tools and information and a consistent business process.

Contact center agents realize productivity gains by having key customer data, call records and other tools at their fingertips. Remote agents require the

following functionality to remain connected to the organization:

- Call information presented in real time;
- Integrated business applications and Web applications for easy access to customer data;
- Performance reports for snapshots of key metrics;
- Presence information for virtual agent team members;
- Real-time chat capabilities between supervisors and other agents to enable communication without having a negative impact on service; and
- Automated workflows that automate transaction best practices such as customer data entry and post-call activities.

Remote agents must have the ability to directly interface with the point-of-sale or CRM software for ease of use

and faster service. Customer calls, along with call history and context, should be transferable to other qualified agents or supervisors, regardless of location.

Contact center supervisors require a management framework to monitor, coach and train centralized or virtual teams. A full-featured supervisor cockpit is essential in the virtual customer interaction environment. Supervisors of remote agents require the following functionality to manage virtual teams effectively:

- Real-time reports of customer contact center key metrics;
- Alerts when contact center events exceed defined thresholds;
- The ability to monitor and record agent calls;
- Real-time agent status (logged in/out, available, talking) and the ability to remotely change agent status;

- Real-time chat capabilities for easy questioning and coaching;
- Intervention tools (barge-in/intercept) for assisting agents in meeting customer needs and call center objectives;
- The ability to push valuable information to agents during training or live call sessions; and
- On-demand agent re-skilling, which gives managers of virtual teams the power to respond to changing environments and reassign contact center resources where and when they are needed.

Reporting, monitoring, recording and coaching tools must enable agents and supervisors to collaborate to solve customer problems instantly when they are not collocated. These capabilities will increase operating efficiency in a virtual environment.

**Edge Architecture: An Intelligent, Virtual Model**

As agents become virtual, using tools to capture their customer interactions at the edge is the best way to measure service. Yet, once agents, supervisors, managers and evaluators are distributed across the enterprise, traditional quality control monitoring techniques become either impractical or difficult to adapt and scale with the enterprise. If conversations are recorded and analyzed at a central site, it becomes impractical to make evaluations in real time. Quality management in a virtual environment thus requires a new approach.

Edge architecture, an innovative approach to IP-based call center applications, builds on the lessons learned from the Internet. By moving business logic closer to the information and events that drive it, and by mobilizing the full computing power and storage capacity of end-user PCs, edge architecture brings several valuable benefits to enterprise call centers, including:

- Faster, easier application development;
- Increased end-user productivity;
- More reliable system performance;
- Expanded system capacity, flexibility and scalability; and

- Reduced capital and operating expenses.

There are various approaches to voice recording and analytics. The traditional approach records all conversations on a central recording server or on multiple servers spread across various sites. The VoIP network delivers incoming calls directly to virtual call center workers at the network edge. As a worker takes a call, the network copies the conversation as a VoIP packet stream to the central site. Special servers record the streams for later analysis.

Not every conversation requires analysis, but since the decision regarding which calls to analyze is made centrally, virtually every conversation must be transported to the central site, which adds to server bloat. Moreover, since VoIP requires priority treatment to alleviate network delay, jitter and loss, VoIP streams must be transported at high-priority. Thus, centralized recording consumes large amounts of high-priority (expensive) bandwidth.

A popular compromise solution places record servers at regional call centers. These distributed servers capture conversations held by local workers. They may also support home workers and smaller sites that lack their own record servers. Conversations recorded on the regional servers are later shipped to the central site for synchronization, archival storage and analysis.

Regional recording reduces high-priority bandwidth utilization since recordings can be shipped to the central site as compressed batch files instead of uncompressed, high-priority VoIP streams. In addition, some filtering can be done at the regional servers, reducing the number of recordings that cross the network.

Still, this method requires expensive record servers — perhaps even redundant record servers — at regional sites. Configuration of these servers can be challenging and can complicate network design. Moreover, to capture live VoIP streams, the record servers must attach to SPAN ports on local LAN switches, reducing the availability of SPAN ports for network monitoring and other important uses.

**Certain recordings still travel to the central site for archival storage or further analysis, but edge recording yields a major reduction in network traffic.**

Edge architecture replaces central or regional record servers with record functions on end-user PCs. Instead of relaying real-time VoIP streams to a central or regional record server, PCs record, filter and analyze conversations where they first enter the virtual call center. Certain recordings still travel to the central site for archival storage or further analysis, but edge recording yields a major reduction in network traffic. Business logic is defined by a manager or supervisor who identifies which conversations to review based on factors such as call length, time of day received and call origin, and downloads those policies to end-user PCs. The PCs filter calls according to the policies and ship back only “calls of interest.” The calls travel to the central site as compressed batch files for minimal bandwidth impact. For even greater savings, PCs can analyze calls themselves and ship back only the results instead of the entire voice files.

Edge architecture gives supervisors more granular control over call selection and filtering than the central or regional approach. If desired, supervisors can set different filtering policies for each edge device instead of just each record server. Edge architecture also leverages PC capacity for a major reduction in server costs, eliminating record servers at distributed sites and avoiding the need for redundant servers since a PC outage affects only one worker. Less archival storage space is required at the central site because only selected calls get shipped back.

As with other edge architecture applications, voice recording and analytics scale with the number of call center

workers, since each worker has his or her own PC. The architecture also enables valuable new capabilities such as real-time voice analysis and alarms, since there is no network delay between the live conversation and the recording process.

Edge-architected quality management virtualizes the quality management process, creating a system that:

- Enables voice and screen recording of any agent at any location without site-based hardware;
- Facilitates the distribution of reports and recorded contacts throughout the organization;
- Enables collaborative contact review and training between remote users;
- Integrates management with the telephony infrastructure; and
- Leverages existing collaboration and training tools.

Of course, compared to the centralized model, edge architecture adds some

operational complexity. Call center operations staff must maintain diverse applications on large numbers of remote PCs and manage policies that apply to large numbers of remote users. However, any worthwhile edge architecture solution includes automatic software verification and update mechanisms. End-user PCs automatically check with the central site upon start-up and download any software or policy updates.

VoIP technologies support improved unified communications, enabling more effective call center applications to provide tangible results such as greater reliability, efficiencies, cost reductions and ultimately improved customer service.

It is critical for virtual contact centers to be correctly deployed and effectively operated to optimally perform and improve customer satisfaction. Agent productivity and team management tools are especially critical in virtual cen-

ters, and best practices must be enforced across distance. Agent productivity and team management tools built in service-oriented architecture (SOA) will boost the efficiency of virtual agents by providing easy access to tools and information and a consistent business process.

Finally, quality monitoring must factor in the unique requirements necessary to support remote agents. By storing recordings on the PC, the complexity of the server architecture and bandwidth requirements are minimized while providing a greater opportunity for evaluation in real time. [CIS](#)

*Gerry Johnson is product manager, Quality Management at Spanlink Communications (news - alert) (<http://www.spanlink.com>), a provider of customer interaction solutions that leverage VoIP technology for transformational business improvements in productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction.*

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# Hosting 101: A Q&A Session With Cincom's Dan Arengo

Moving away from tradition can sometimes be a good thing. In the case of a contact center, this can be especially true when making the switch to a hosted or on-demand solution. A hosted solution provides organizations of all sizes with reduced cost and risk, better management and more choices when compared to traditional on-premise solutions.

Deciding if the switch is a wise one for your organization means recognizing these benefits and understanding the basics.

To get some more information on the basics and to uncover some of the key benefits a hosted contact center solution provides, I asked Dan Arengo, senior industry consultant with Cincom (<http://www.cincom.com>), ([news - alert](#)) a provider of hosted contact center solutions, to answer a few questions on the topic.

**SV: It seems as though the hosted model is increasingly becoming a preferred choice; why do you believe this is so?**

**DA:** The hosted model lets small and mid-sized organizations access some really powerful software capabilities that they would not be able to afford or internally support if on-premise was the only option. So this market segment is gravitating to hosted because it allows them to compete with much larger organizations without investing in the software, hardware and internal resources. Bottom line – the hosted model simplifies the acquisition of technology and that is very appealing.

**SV: What benefits can a company realize from choosing the hosted model?**

**DA:** Generally you can expect a fairly rapid return on investment because you don't have to recover the capital investments in hardware and upfront software licensing. Instead, monthly hosting fees are typically an operational expense so the productivity, efficiency and revenue gains from the hosted solution can immediately impact ROI. In addition, the implementation of a hosted solution is typically much shorter, sometimes only weeks, because the vendor's hosting infrastructure is already in place.

**SV: How does a hosted contact center provide ROI for companies, and why is this an important factor?**

**DA:** The ROI for a hosted contact center can take many different forms depending on each unique business. In general, there are typically some "hard returns" or quantifiable returns like



increased revenues and lower costs, as well as "soft returns," which are more difficult to measure but may be as important or even more important to a business. The soft returns might be improved customer experience and agent satisfaction. ROI is critical to any technology purchase so it is important to work with your vendor to clearly identify and measure the areas where you can expect to see improvements and then set up the appropriate measurements to ensure that you are meeting expectations.

**SV: Are there different types of hosted models? If so, can you briefly explain the differences?**

**DA:** There are essentially three major categories of hosted services available to contact centers:

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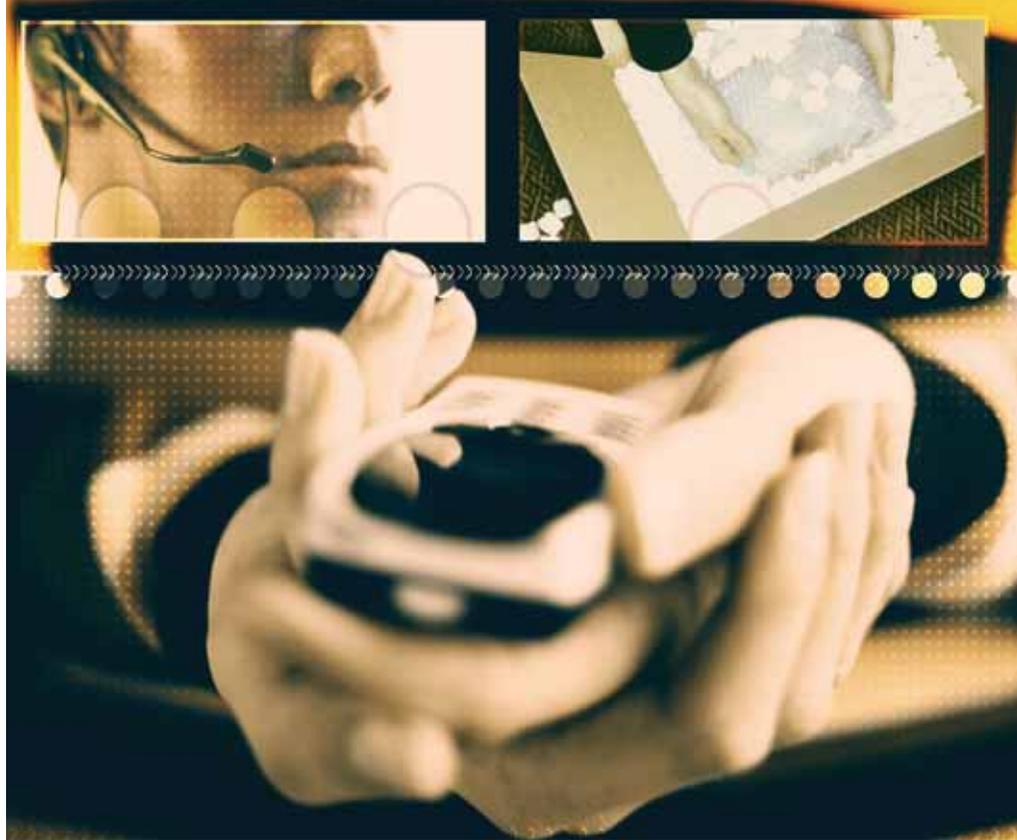
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**SV: What are some of the risks/complexities associated with a traditional system that a hosted one resolves?**

**DA:** A hosted solution essentially transfers all of the hardware, software and support issues from the user’s premise to the vendor or hosting partner. Issues of redundancy, security and upgrades, for example, fall on your partner instead of adding additional complexity and responsibilities to what is probably already an overbooked IT department. That said, your staff will need to be accessible to the partner to ensure a successful implementation and ongoing performance.

**SV: In what ways can agent productivity and usage be increased by choosing the hosted model?**

**DA:** The hosted model enables agents to work from anywhere. This capability can deliver a great deal of flexibility to an organization. For example, agents can work from home or extended geographies, greatly expanding your labor pool and increasing agent satisfaction. In addition, it provides business continuity when agents can’t get to the center due to outages or emergencies. This

is particularly important to small contact centers that typically don’t have comprehensive disaster recovery plans in place.

**SV: What are some of the security issues associated with a hosted contact center? How are they handled?**

**DA:** Some people argue that security is an issue for a hosted solution because it uses the Internet and possibly VoIP (voice over Internet protocol). In reality, however, if the solution has been architected from the ground up with security as a priority, it should surpass the most stringent security standards. Discuss security with your provider using these topics as an outline:

- Security priority and experience;
- Application security;
- Secure data transmission;
- Customer data privacy;
- Physical data security; and
- Security policies and procedures.

**SV: Is the hosted solution an option for all, or is it more beneficial to companies of a certain size?**

**DA:** There are no size constraints as most hosted solutions can scale to an unlimited number of users. Hosting is especially appealing to small to mid-sized organizations that need sophisticated technology but don’t have the

internal resources or budget to purchase it outright. Large enterprises with IT resources and adequate budget often undergo a buy versus host exercise.

**SV: For those looking to a hosted contact center solution, how easy is it to set up? Are there fees and commitments involved?**

**DA:** A hosted contact center is going to be easier to implement than an on-premise solution because the hosting center already has all of the components in place. The complexity of the implementation itself will depend upon the needs of the organization. Generally, an existing contact center with legacy systems and more complex procedures will be a longer implementation while a newer center with simpler needs can be implemented in weeks. In general, you can expect monthly usage fees based on the number of agents in your center and the functionality used. For example, one contact center may implement all customer channels — voice, e-mail, Web and chat — plus an agent desktop that unifies all of the information and resources the agents need to interact — plus reporting and analytics. The per-seat price will be higher for this scenario than the organization that just needs the agent desktop plus e-mail and fax. **CIS**



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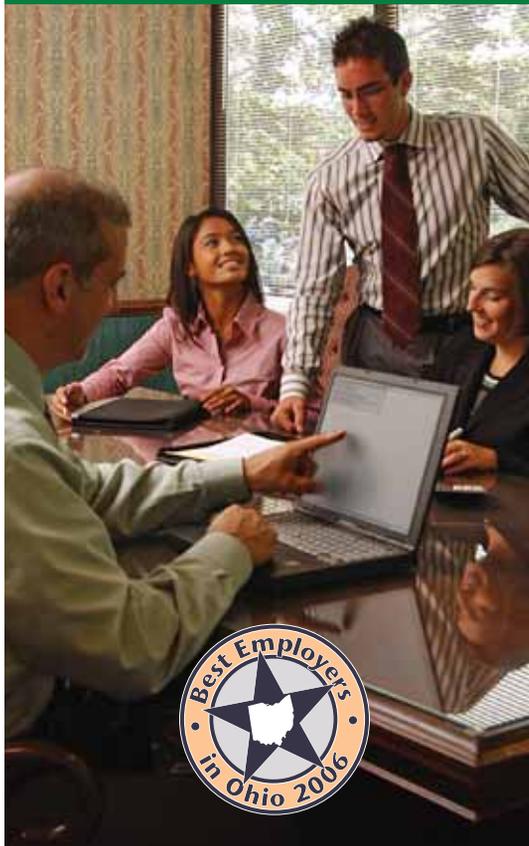
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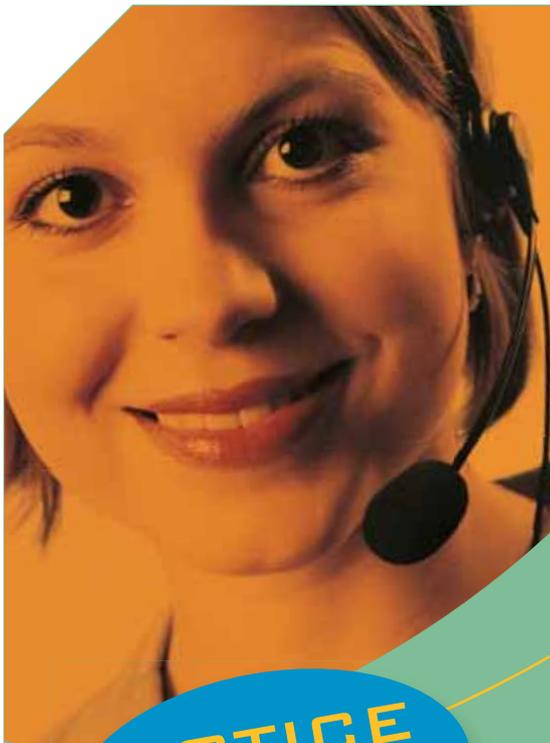
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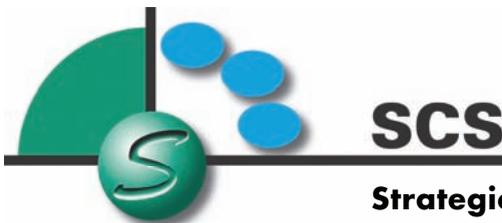
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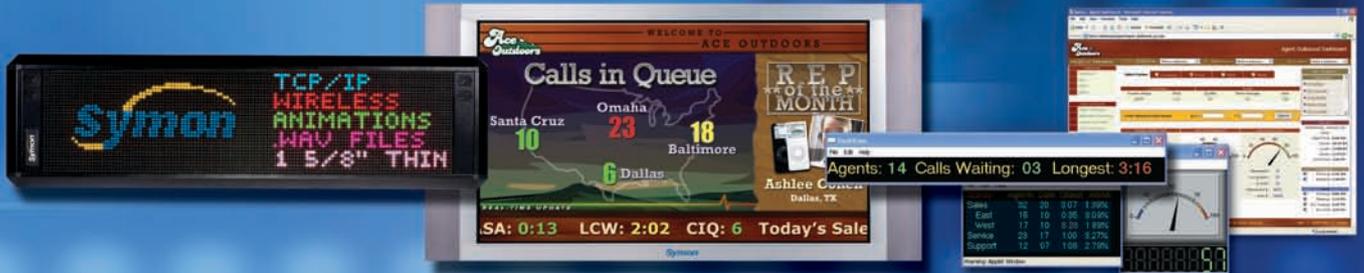


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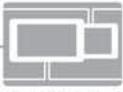
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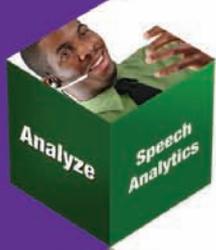
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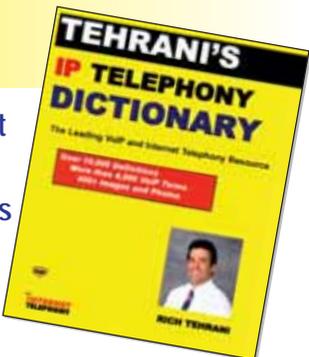
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By Tracey E. Schelmetic  
Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

## A Call Center? We're Not A Call Center!

I had the pleasure recently of visiting with members of the management team of call center solutions provider [Amcat International](#). ([news](#) - [alert](#)) During the course of our conversation, they indicated that a lot of the companies they encounter on a regular basis, many of them customers, don't refer to themselves as call centers. I've encountered this phenomenon as well. Sure, they're buying call center solutions, they have employees who make and take calls to and from customers, they use call routing, dialers, IVRs, workforce management, headsets and CRM and/or sales force management solutions. But they're genuinely surprised when referred to as call centers. "Call center? We're not a call center."

It seems that to a lot of people, if you're not interrupting North American families between bites of baked chicken and green beans at dinnertime to sell them aluminum siding, you're not a call center.

I've been thinking about this phenomenon for the last few days. How do you market to companies that buy your products but don't believe themselves to be in your marketplace? I find it a little like the tiptoe marketing that needs to be done for men's skincare. Skincare for men is a very hot growth area right now. Companies like Nivea that never had a particularly girly image are doing well, but the more female-oriented companies are having to launch new lines, with manly names, to avoid being associated with cosmetics. It's not moisturizer, it's "after-shave balm." It's not exfoliator, it's pumice toughening scrub...the pumice no doubt ground up by Thor's hammer in a particularly manly way. And remember...the men aren't doing this to look better or try to get rid of wrinkles or age spots...nuh-uh...they like the smell of the products.

In the same vein, I was recently shopping in the dried fruit section of the supermarket and came across a bag of product that was labeled "dried plums." No, they're not prunes...they're dried plums, and don't you forget it. It seems prunes have developed a tarnished (or wrinkled?) reputation over the years as something to be taken, like medicine, when nature doesn't...err...move along as she ought.

So how does the call center industry overcome the male-moisturizer-and-prune complex?

To many people, a call center is something that is outsourced. We hear a lot of negative news lately about "call centers being outsourced to [fill in your country of choice]." Years ago, few members of the general public had ever heard the term "call center." Now, most people understand the term, but only as it applies to jobs flying offshore to Southeast Asia. Maybe this is why the industry is filling up with acronyms...customer service facility, CRM center, customer interaction management center or just "the floor".

Or maybe it's the fault of the vendors, who use the term "call center" for their products less often than you might think. Companies all have an appellation they create for themselves. It's that line you see in their press releases just

after they mention their corporate name for the first time: "Acme Inc., a leading provider of customer-enabling and total lifecycle management enterprise solutions, announced today that someone finally cleaned out the grotty microwave in the break room" or "Mimsy Enterprises, a best-of-breed b-to-c provider of knowledge-nibbling database solutions for increased customer delight, has nothing to say today but thought it ought to issue a press release."

I take calls regularly from people looking to find out how big the call center market is. "How many call centers are there in the U.S.?" they ask. I answer, with perfect frankness, "I have no idea." Another answer to that question is, "How long is a string?" Many of these callers are Wall Street types looking to get an investment picture of the marketplace.

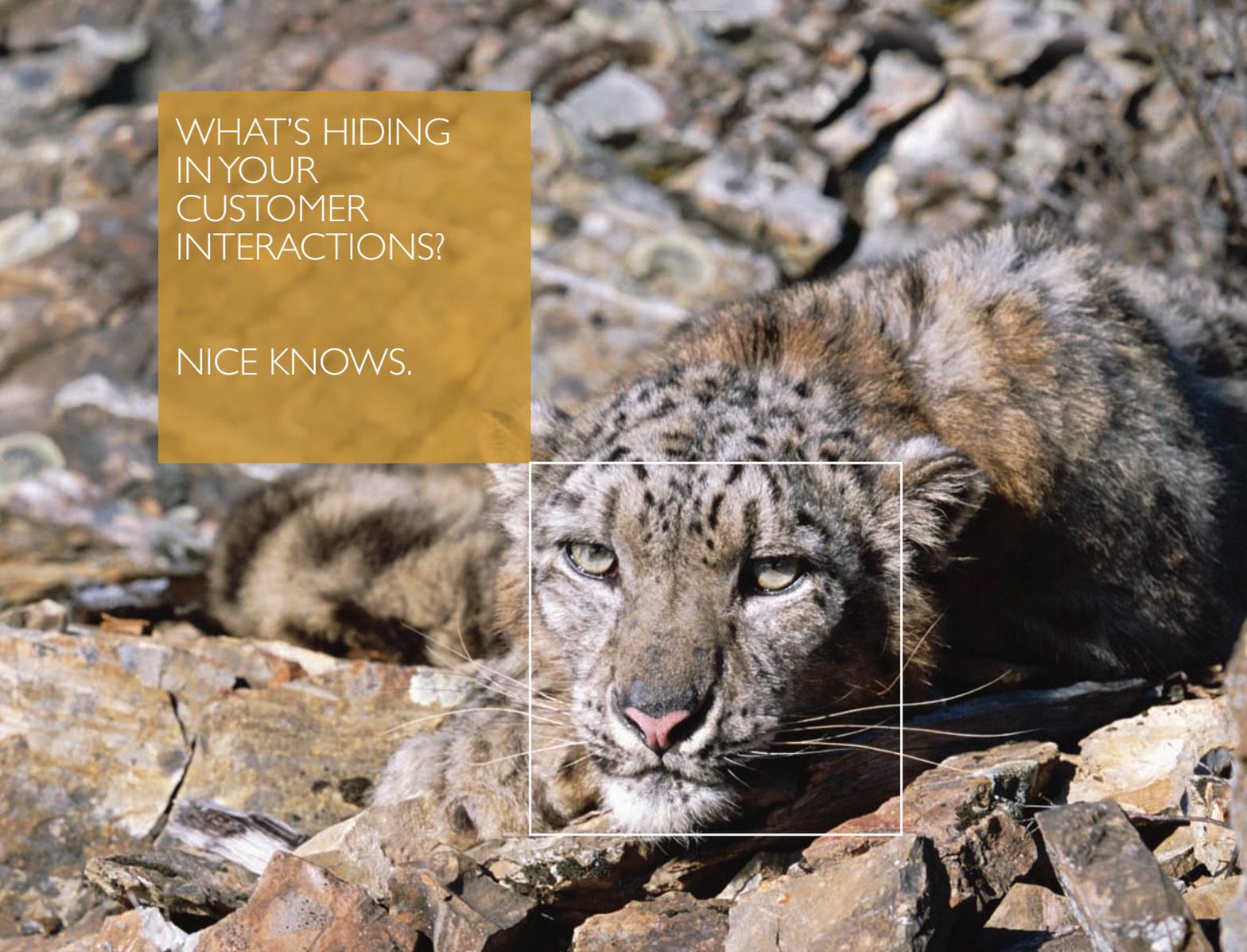
There are certainly many, many call centers. There are also many help desks. There are many customer service departments. There are lots of internal sales departments. There are a lot of mobile, wireless networked knowledge workers. BPO companies are popping up like dandelions. Are they all call centers? Are only the dinner-interrupting, baked-chicken-ruining aluminum siding sellers call centers? Are only the out-sourced entities call centers?

This industry does itself no favors when it dodges the term "call center." It's not a dirty word. Instead of the extraordinarily immense unified marketplace it ought to be...between all of its bits and unaligned pieces it employs as much as three percent of the North American workforce...it too often resembles a collection of like objects striving hard to point out how they are different from one another. A collection of things that are not like the other ones may be educational on Sesame Street, but it doesn't attract investors or skilled management talent. It doesn't build a positive picture of the industry in the general public's mind.

So...call centers and call center solutions providers of the world, stand up and say, "Yes! We're a call center! We sell call center products!"

And if you ever witness a man suddenly leaping up and yelling, "Yes! I use moisturizer!", give him some encouragement. And be sure to eat your prunes. [CIS](#)

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



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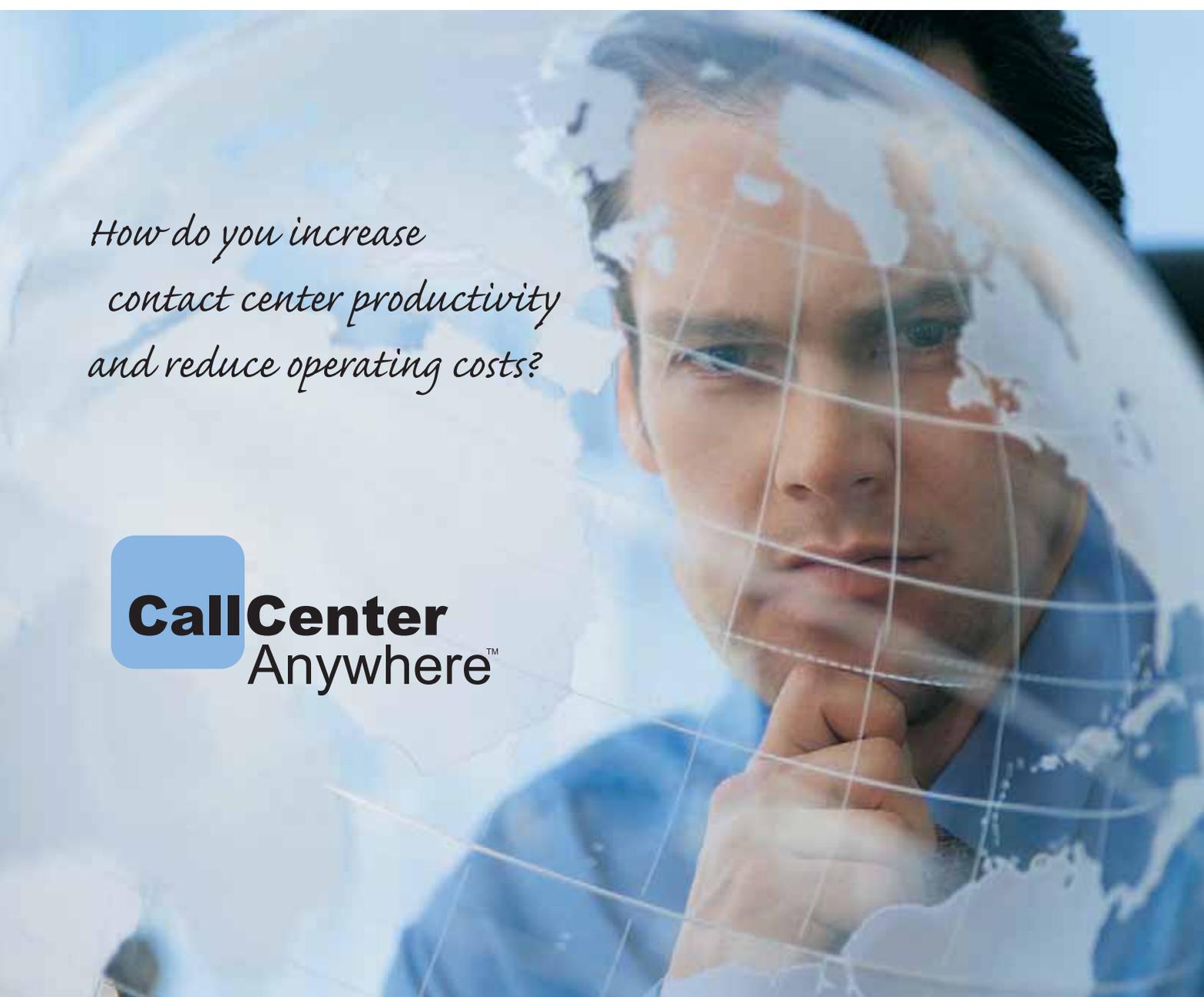
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