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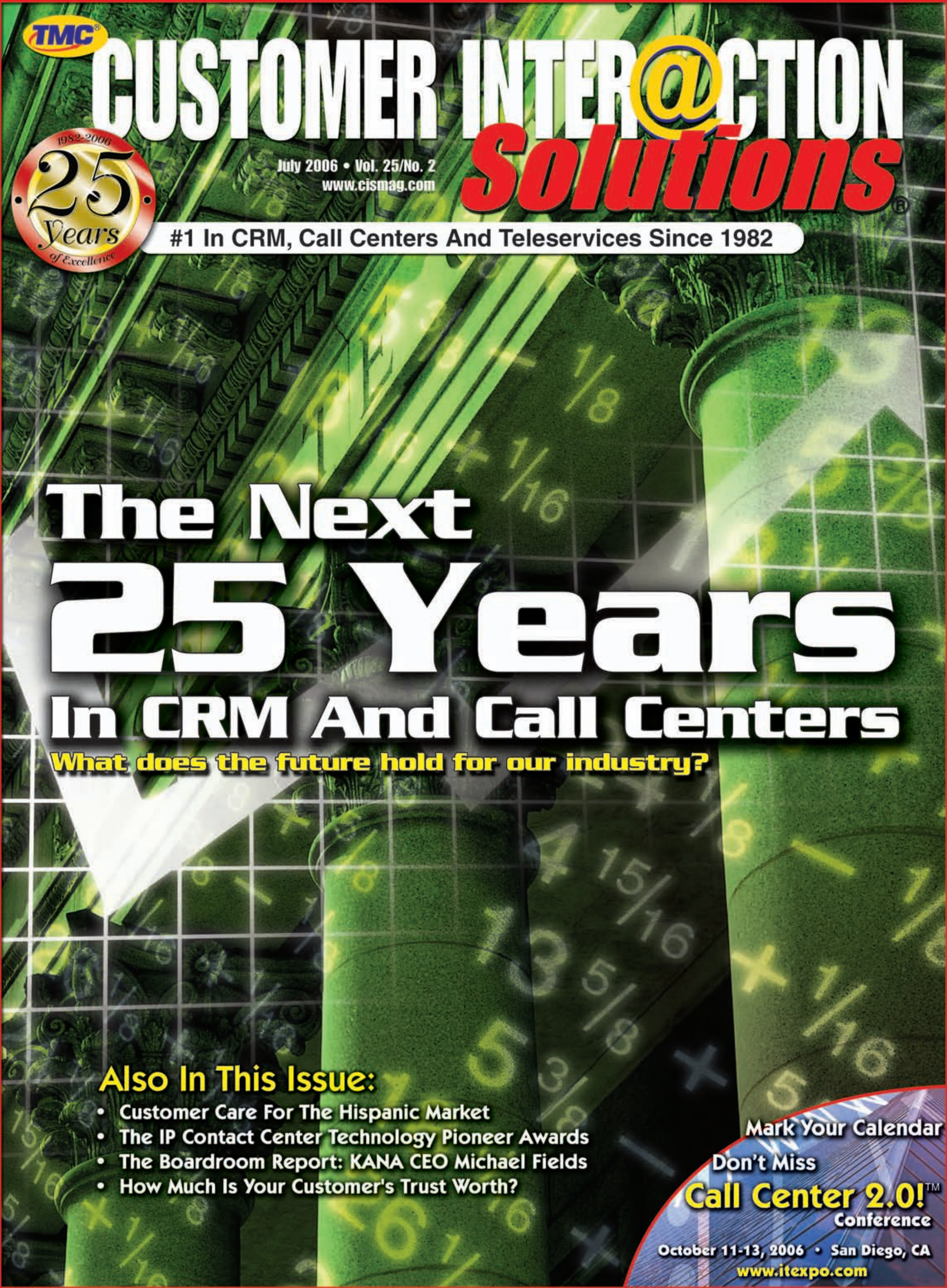

The Next 25 Years In CRM And Call Centers

What does the future hold for our industry?

Also In This Issue:

- Customer Care For The Hispanic Market
- The IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Awards
- The Boardroom Report: KANA CEO Michael Fields
- How Much Is Your Customer's Trust Worth?

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By: Nadji Tehrani,
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Editor-in-Chief,
Technology Marketing Corporation

THE NEXT 25 YEARS In CRM And Call Centers

- Quality And Customer Care Will Be The Only Sustainable Competitive Advantage!
- Become An Early Adopter Of Advanced Technology And Prosper
- Speaking Of Growth... You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet!

Background

In the May and June 2006 editorials and prior issues, we covered extensively how the contact center industry was pioneered by launching TMC's flagship publication, *Telemarketing®* magazine, in June 1982.

Along the way, we encountered hundreds of obstacles, and I thank God we managed to overcome just about all of them.

Frankly, our industry associations could have been more united to push in the same direction...forward!! Unfortunately, at times, they were going in different directions, thus paving the way for harmful regulations!

Against all odds, our amazing industry grew at phenomenal speeds. In the 1980s, estimated average growth for the industry was 200 to 300 percent per year. In the 1990s, the growth rate was about 30 percent per year, and after September 11th, in spite of a major offshore exodus, do-not-call legislation, etc., the domestic business-to-business, collections and fund raising sectors continue to grow at about 20 to 25 percent per year (in teleservices outsourcing) and 50 to 60 percent in the new call center technology sectors.

In addition, today about 100 to 200 new call centers are announced by major organizations in any given month!

The telephone becomes the primary instrument for developing customer care.

Customer Care Is Here To Stay

As the global economy evolves, more and more competitors will enter the business world. As such, competition will become far more intense and the price of goods, along with quality, will decline rapidly, forcing many companies out of business. All global manufacturers will aim for producing better, faster and cheaper products!

In other words, no matter what product you produce, someone else in China, India or the Philippines, etc. can make it better, faster and cheaper.

QUALITY CUSTOMER CARE AND SERVICE WILL BE THE ONLY SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE!

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Online, VoIP And Call Centers Are Here to Stay For The Foreseeable Future

For a variety of reasons, conventional wisdom dictates that the call center will forever be the heart of every organization.

My reasons for thinking this are as follows:

1. Every company is a call center. As I have indicated in many of these editorials, if you take the telephone out of any company, that company will eventually vanish. It stands to reason that businesses need revenue, revenue is based on relationships, and relationships are nurtured primarily by personal visits and interaction with customers. In absence of that, the telephone is the primary source of building relationships with customers. As such, the telephone becomes the primary instrument for developing customer care.

2. At the moment, the world is thinking about and moving toward online marketing, online purchasing and providing online information.

For the foreseeable future, this trend will continue because it is inconceivable to think of any new technology to replace the Internet and/or the telephone and/or customer care and/or the development of relationships with customers.

3. The process of building strong relationships with customers is the heart of any organization. No company or business entity will get very far without cultivating powerful and mutually beneficial relationships with customers. As indicated above, the telephone and call centers will play vital roles in that scenario.

4. As the world discovers the incredible power of online marketing, online shopping and online information dissemination, the Internet will become one of the most powerful medias ever known to mankind. As the world goes to the Internet to find solutions to market and conduct business, invariably, the human touch will become the most important vehicle in business.

In other words, for the foreseeable future, consumers will require person-to-person interactive relationships for major transactions and purchases. In the 1980s, I defined telemarketing as "a people-to-people interactive relationship vehicle," which explained the tremendous growth, success and prosperity of telemarketing in the 80s, 90s, 2000 and beyond. Going forward, it is conceivable that a small portion of the population known as "techies" or "geeks" will become perhaps the only individuals who would rather have no relationship with the rest of mankind. But the rest of the world is not likely to change, because human interaction in every aspect of life will continue to play a major role.

5. As the online world of transactions, marketing, business, purchasing, etc. grows, so will the need for contact centers, because consumers around the globe will always prefer personal information from a live body, particularly when they are considering buying any significant product or service. Accordingly, this will fuel tremendous new growth and applications for call centers, which is why I stated in the title of this editorial "You ain't seen nothing yet."

The New York Times Story Also Supports My Thinking

In the June 25, 2006 issue of *The New York Times*' business section, there was an article entitled, "Waiting For The Dough On The Web" by Richard Siklos. The following is an excerpt, and indicates why unparalleled growth is in the immediate future for online transactions of all kinds:

"Only six percent of all advertising spending in the United States went to the Internet in the first quarter of the year, according to Merrill Lynch. But it was clearly the fastest-growing category — up 38 percent year over year. And Price Waterhouse Coopers forecasts that Internet ad spending over the next five years will more than double globally, to $51.6 billion."

CRM Eventually Will Be Replaced By Customer Care

Admittedly, it takes a lot of courage to make a statement like this. However, given that my vision has been proved to be true several times in the last quarter century, I am confident that CRM eventually will be replaced by customer care. Here are a few reasons why:

1. Most CRM installations to date have been disappointing in terms of performance, to say the least. The reason is that manufacturers were over-promising and under-delivering the benefits of CRM systems.

2. As you may recall, the CRM concept gained tremendous popularity; as a result, many manufacturers of CRM software showed considerable initial revenue and profitability. However, as we all know, the growth of CRM has been significantly reduced simply because many users are disappointed, and once they are disappointed, they are not likely to come back to the system easily.

3. Customer care, without question, will be the new buzzword for the foreseeable future, because once a relationship is built on a strong foundation, the nurturing of that relationship via customer care is the only way to maintain a credible relationship and continue substantial business transactions among the parties involved.

Speaking Of Credibility

Some 25 years ago, as I have indicated in many of these editorials, when I launched *Telemarketing* magazine, the tagline was "The magazine of electronic marketing and communications." That is, 25 years ago, my vision indicated that someday in the future, all marketing and business transactions would be done electronically. Here we are, 25 years later, and it seems that our vision was right on. It is based on this type of vision that I predict that CRM will soon be replaced by customer care, and the companies that begin to develop today new products and services for customer care will be the pioneers and the most successful vendors of the future for the contact center industry.

The Case Of Rapid Technological Developments

New technological developments have always been years and decades ahead of the widespread adoption of such technologies by call centers. This has always been the case and will continue to be the case. However, in recent years, several major new technologies are offering so much promise that I believe they will be with us for the foreseeable future, while undergoing continuous development and refinements. These technologies are:

1. VoIP, which stands for voice over Internet protocol. This technology is here to stay until something better comes along (because it offers as much as 95 percent cost reduction in telecommunications). No call center in the world can ignore this unparalleled cost reduction, to say nothing about the tremendously improved technological capabilities that come exclusively from the adoption of IP telephony. If you are interested in learning more about this topic, I suggest that you refer to http://www.itexpo.com and learn all about TMC's INTERNET TELEPHO-

NY Conference & Expo, which will be held from October 10-13, 2006 in San Diego, California. For your information, this is the 14th global INTERNET TELEPHONY Conference & Expo sponsored by TMC, and it is considered to be the world's most educational and best-attended convention of its kind. Some 10,000 attendees from 115 countries are expected at this October's event. Speaking of conventions, our newly launched "Call Center 2.0" will be collocated with INTERNET TELEPHONY Conference & Expo. For more information, visit http://www.tmcnet.com/275.1.

2. Advanced Speech Technology. As indicated in the last two dozen Publisher's Outlooks, advanced speech technology will also play a vital role in the future of call centers. This technology, too, is here to stay because at the moment it is offering as much as an 85 percent reduction in the cost of labor. We have learned that many leading companies, such as Microsoft and IBM, are spending fortunes to develop future generations of speech technology to enhance call center operations while improving performance and bringing uniformity of presentations to customers. It is our understanding that the long-term goals of the leading technology companies today are to perfect this technology so that it rivals the human voice and, in fact, exceeds human capabilities. So if you haven't looked at speech solutions, I urge you to do so, because competing in the marketplace in the future will depend on this vital technology.

Other technologies that will play major roles in the development of future call centers innovations are as follows:

1. IP contact center solutions, the benefits of which are described above.

2. IMS, which stands for IP Multimedia Subsystems. This new technology offers by far the greatest promise for the future of telecommunications technology. It is the opinion of leading IMS authorities, such as the editors of IMS™ magazine, that in the foreseeable future, this new technology will play a vital role in the contact center industry. To learn more about IMS, we suggest that you visit http://www.imsmag.com, where you can sign up to receive a free digital subscription of this new publication.

3. SIP, which stands for Session Initiation Protocol, is yet another new technology that offers equally significant future potential for the contact center industry. To learn more about SIP™ magazine and to receive a free digital subscription, please visit http://www.sipmag.com. SIP™ magazine is also published by TMC.

The Role Of Teleservices In The Next 25 Years

Teleservices companies are the providers of call center services on an outsourced basis on behalf of Corporate America. This outstanding group of professionals represents the greatest depth of experience. When chosen judiciously, an outsourced teleservices provider can significantly improve many companies' bottom lines.

As call center technology becomes more sophisticated, Corporate America would be wise to focus on their businesses by outsourcing those functions that are not their core competencies. The most cost-effective and professional way to offer world-class customer care is to consider outsourcing, particularly to those teleservices companies that are regularly honored in this publication's Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking and the MVP (Marketing Via Phone) Quality Awards. Readers can find the listings of the Top 50 Teleservices Agencies (inbound and outbound) in the March and April 2006 issues of *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*, and the MVP Quality Award winners in the February 2006 issue.

Two of the vitally important services offered by teleservices companies are lead generation and customer acquisition. There are many teleservices agencies that specialize in these vitally important areas and, therefore, they should be contacted when such services are needed.

Some New Concepts Also Look Promising

Hosted call center solutions and the use of home agents also show considerable promise in the contact center industry, and we believe that these concepts will remain with us and become more and more sophisticated and widely used as we go forward.

How Marketing Will Change, And How To Stay Ahead Of Your Competition

Some 15 years ago, I changed the tagline of this publication to read as follows: "The magazine of integrated marketing."

Once again, it was my vision that someday marketing would transform into integrated marketing. It took 15 years for the industry to embrace this new idea and this new vision of mine, and today I am pleased to note that practically every progressive company is open to this tremendously important concept.

The Nine Guidelines For Market Share Supremacy For The Foreseeable Future

1. You must think out-of-the-box;

2. You must own online marketing. In other words, you need to be on the first page of leading search engines such as Google, Yahoo, etc. If it is your goal to be perceived as an industry leader, you must be on the first page of search results. At TMC, we specialize in helping our customers appear on the first page of Google searches; in many cases, our customers become number one in their search terms on the first page of Google results! If you are interested in learning more, please visit http://www.tmcnet.com or drop me an e-mail at ntehrani@tmcnet.com. Always remember: if you are not on the first page of search engine results, you don't exist!

3. You must master integrated marketing. As explained in previous Publisher's Outlooks, there is no other way. You must simply adopt integrated marketing.

4. Master customer care;

5. Master customer service and CRM;

6. Know your competition;

7. Develop a winning technology and marketing strategy;

8. Above all, become a master marketer — remember that the best products without effective marketing are worthless; and

9. Partner with the leading media with the largest online reach. To be effective, an online medium must have in excess of one million unique visitors and in excess of 15 million page views per month. As a point of reference, I would like to share with you that TMCnet.com is currently experiencing 1,050,000 unique visitors and 18 million page views per month.

Good luck and best wishes. As always, I would love to hear your comments. Please e-mail me at ntehrani@tmcnet.com. CIS

IMPORTANT:
Please remember where you **first** read this pioneering effort before the copycats copy us (as usual) and pass it off as their own.

TMC CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®
July 2006 Volume 25/ Number 1

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A big part of the answer is the "A" in SFA — automation. Automation gives marketers more time to be strategic and monitor campaign effectiveness, and tweak programs on the fly.

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Companies often call on me to ask, "What is the best way to reach Hispanics?" Or, "How does a company create a culturally relevant ad campaign?" These are great questions, but for most companies, especially those that have just decided to target this marketplace, they are also very premature questions.

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By Natalie L. Petouhoff and Brian Johnson, Hitachi Consulting

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Customer Inter@ction Solutions magazine launched the IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Awards to highlight for readers the best of the best in this emergent technology that is saving call centers all over the world a great deal of time, effort and capital. We've chosen as winners the products with the most admirable feature sets and the best track records of dramatically improving the operations of today's call centers.

TMCNET.COM ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

A Brief Interview With Oracle's Mike Betzer Regarding Telephony@Work

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

Said Betzer, "If you look at Siebel's Contact On Demand, the underbelly of it is Telephony@Work. Also, integrations to Oracle and PeopleSoft are underway ... we were already working those as partners; it will go even faster now that the entire IT organization is part of Oracle."

Read the full article at http://www.tmcnet.com/318.1

Eighty Seven Percent Of B2Bs Queasy About Customer Data Quality

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Does it shock you that 87 percent of business-to-business respondents in a recent survey expressed "little confidence" in their customer data?

Read the full article at http://www.tmcnet.com/319.1

IPods, Cell Phones, IM Help World Recover From Baby Boom Generation

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

It's a little-known historical fact that after filling the backlogged orders for Bibles, Gutenberg's second job with his newfangled printing press was to run off a broadsheet for a sociologist at the University of Mainz complaining that the youth of the fifteenth-century Rhine Valley were not respecting their elders' social conventions and norms, and spending way too much time with such cutting-edge personal technology as sharpened sticks and charcoal, and their preoccupation with their peer group was keeping them from appropriate interests in pig slopping and buying indulgences from itinerant pardoners.

Read the full article at http://www.tmcnet.com/320.1

Hot Tips: How Your Furniture Purchase Can Pay For Itself

By TMCnet Special Guest David Kendrick, President, Interior Concepts

When it comes time to purchase furniture for agents, supervisors, or administrative employees, a company's bottom line can be directly impacted. But if companies make the "right" furniture decision, a furniture purchase can actually pay for itself.

Read the full article at http://www.tmcnet.com/321.1

CORRECTION: *In the June issue listing of Customer Inter@ction Solutions magazine's Lifetime Achievement Award Honorees (page 14), Amcat International Inc. was inadvertently left out of the listing. We regret the error.*

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

Behold The Virtual Salesforce

I can tell you from personal experience that managing a sales force is one part art and one part science. Sales managers fulfill the simultaneous roles of parent, friend, confidante, coach and counselor. One of the trickiest issues is knowing when you have succeeded. Whoever coined the old adage, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it" was spot on. Perhaps he or she was a sales manager.

It can be difficult enough to manage your "direct reports," or the people who work in your organization. An even more complicated issue is how to manage partners or other companies that have been tasked with selling for you.

Often, the management of these activities is accomplished via spreadsheets. Managers pore over these documents for hours at a time, looking for ways to make sense of the data and determine whether the organization will adhere to it budgetary restrictions and sales goals.

Problems such as these are the inspiration for a new service from Salesforce.com, aptly named Partnerforce, which Salesforce bills as its very own "Partner Exchange." Partnerforce connects enterprises and partners through the power of Salesforce.com's AppExchange. In layman's terms, this product creates a virtual salesforce.

The advantage of Partnerforce, according to the company, is twofold. Partners receive access to CRM software, and the corporation can better manage what those partners are doing. Integrated dashboards are used to allow managers to see what is happening in the sales pipeline throughout the buying cycle. To keep the pipeline full, lead distribution is added into the mix, allowing leads to be distributed to the internal sales team as well as the channel partners. In this way, deals are basically "registered" and fully documented from the start, so the potential for conflict and misunderstanding is minimized from the start. The portals can be branded by each partner, if they so desire, as they are highly customizable.

Salesforce Partner Edition has many, though not all, the features of Salesforce's flagship CRM product. In addition to the base subscription of Salesforce Enterprise or Unlimited Edition, pricing for Salesforce Partner Edition is $1,500 per partner per year for five partner employees. These are cumulative employees; it's acceptable if one partner has two employees and another has eight, for example.

I spoke with some very enthusiastic individuals at Salesforce.com in my quest to learn more about this new offering: Bruce Francis, vice president, Corporate Strategy; Elay Cohen, product manager; and Kendall Collins, vice president of product marketing. (The three kept passing the discussion back and forth during the course of my conference call, so I will give them all joint credit for the information in this article).

The common idea I came away with is that all three believe that Partnerforce is essentially the next "killer app." I certainly believe it has the potential to be a killer app, but I also believe there may be enough apathy in the marketplace to make this service irrelevant. Don't get me wrong, it has all the bells and whistles it needs. It's just that partners are an incredibly tough group of people to get motivated. There is a great deal of inertia, and many people continue to find Excel the application they love to hate. It is just so tough to break a bad habit sometimes.

In doing my part as an evangelist of useful technology, I will go out on a

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short limb and say that partners should definitely try this service, as it genuinely seems designed to make life easier and allow everyone to focus on the most important element — the customer.

Our industry loves buzzwords, so I will at this point introduce the term PRM, or partner relationship management. The term became fashionable at the time of the dotcom boom, and then abruptly went out of style (very much like the dotcoms themselves). Salesforce.com thinks they have discovered the ultimate recipe to make PRM stick this time. If raw enthusiasm is the sole criterion, then based on my conversation, Salesforce.com is in a great position to make it happen.

One part of the solution that impressed me very much is its partner incentive area, where partners request marketing dollars for a specific event. The company would use the system to submit proof of performance (as an attachment) before they receive approval and, subsequently, a check. This is a slick way to get partners used to using the service. After they try it, they might just find they like it. (Just like Mikey and his Life cereal back in the 1970s.)

Another great feature of the service is as follows: when a partner registers a deal, even if they don't end up selling it, they can benefit by having concrete proof that they were responsible, in part, for the sale.

So where I am skeptical, Salesforce.com (news - alert) sees opportunity. After all, they say that 70 percent of sales are indirect. They are right — there is great potential here. The question remains: will their customers have enough carrots to dangle in front of their partners?

Opinions About An Old Rival

While I was on the phone with Bruce, Elay and Kendall, I had to take a moment and ask what they thought of the acquisition of Siebel by Oracle. After all, the rivalry between these companies is the stuff of CRM legend. Their answer was that they don't see Siebel as much anymore. Siebel, as they say, doesn't exist anymore. They indicated that Larry (Ellison, of course) has depressed real estate values on the peninsula (meaning that there are so few Siebel people left). They went on to say that these are "dark days for Oracle and Siebel," as Oracle is tasked with consolidating seven CRM products: a difficult challenge under any circumstances.

I mentioned the good earnings recently posted by Oracle, and Bruce, Elay and Kendall paraphrased Mark Benioff, Salesforce.com's very quotable CEO, who said that Oracle has "assembled a Shady Pines Retirement Home of enterprise software," or an organization that benefits primarily from rich maintenance revenues.

I will be sure to keep you posted on any updates on Salesforce.com or Oracle as they arise. CIS

From Hosted CRM To Hosted Contact Centers

Mansour Salame is the illustrious leader of a company called Contactual (formerly White Pajama or White PJ). (news - alert) His company went through difficult times after the technology bubble burst. While some tried to sink the company, he wrestled back control and has turned it into a success: Contactual recently announced that it has received $9 million in funding. I was intrigued and had to learn more, so I sent Mansour a series of questions via e-mail, and here are his responses:

RT: You recently received funding...congratulations. What will you be doing with the money?

MS: Thank you, Rich. We are going to leverage the investment in the following areas: product development and distribution through partnerships and direct sales.

RT: How are sales doing?

MS: Sales are doing really well. We are seeing incredible demand, both through our partnerships and the direct sales channel. We are growing globally and will be opening an office in Japan, an announcement we made on July 11th. We are also establishing a presence in Europe — the announcement of that new office will come shortly.

RT: There is so much interest in hosting today, are you seeing customers more readily accepting the hosted model?

MS: Absolutely. In our traditional market of less than one hundred seats, we are seeing very robust demand. We also receive unsolicited inquiries for contact center deployments of hundreds of seats, whereas before we rarely saw demand for hosted contact centers of over 100 seats. We believe the market is shifting to this model.

RT: Who is educating customers about the benefits of hosting?

MS: We try to. We are always working on white papers and case studies that educate the reader on the benefits of the on-demand contact center model. Please review the white papers and case studies we have posted on our Web site (http://www.contactual.com) to be downloaded for free. We are currently working on several more to be released shortly.

Also, consultants who used to push the on-premise contact center model are now seeing the results of early adopters having great success with hosted contact centers. These consultants are advising their clients to consider a hosted alternative to traditional systems.

RT: What are the biggest roadblocks to increased hosting success in contact centers?

MS: People have the wrong perception of hosted contact centers. They remember the first-generation hosted applications and their inability to provide a feasible solution to the contact center market. These perceptions have created a number of myths that reinforce the superiority of the on-premise solutions. However, the new generation of on-demand contact center applications, such as Contactual, provides a clear advantage over the on-premise systems in terms of cost, flexibility, reliability, scalability and ease-of-use. Shortly, we will be releasing a white paper that addresses these myths in detail. You will be able to download it free of charge from our Web site.

RT: What do you think of the Telephony@Work acquisition by Oracle?

MS: It looks like acquisition by Oracle was the only exit for Telephony@Work. It wasn't a sustainable company; it is unclear whether it would have survived if it weren't acquired. Telephony@Work's customers are worried about how they will be treated now, and they should be. We were recently approached by several of them.

RT: Where do you see the hosted contact center market going in five years?

MS: By 2011, the majority of the new contact center seats will be provided on-demand.

RT: Thank you, Mansour.

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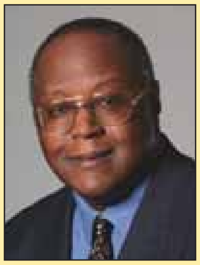
THE BOARDROOM REPORT™
WITH NADJI TEHRANI



KANA: A Leader In Highly Scalable Multichannel Customer Service Solutions

The Boardroom Report provides the CRM, customer interaction and call center industry's view from the top, featuring the sector's first in-depth, exclusive CEO-to-CEO interviews with leading executives regarding industry news, analysis, trends and the latest developments at their companies. As the industry's leading publication since 1982, it is our responsibility to recognize leaders with the best minds in the industry and share their vision and wisdom with our valued readers. For this installment of The Boardroom Report, Technology Marketing Corp. founder/chairman/CEO Nadji Tehrani spoke with Michael Fields, CEO and Chairman of the Board of KANA Software, Inc. (news - alert)

NT: Please tell us about your company and your type of business.

MF: KANA Software provides an integrated suite of software applications that helps companies manage their customer service channels, including e-mail, chat, telephone and Web self-service. The core applications in this suite are KANA IQ, KANA Response and KANA Response Live. These are well established products in the marketplace that are generating tremendous results for over 600 companies worldwide, including almost half of the Fortune 100. Our technology enables very successful interactions between our customers and their customers, regardless of channel, so that businesses can foster loyalty and satisfaction while reducing costs.

NT: That's impressive. What would you say is the greatest challenge your company is facing?

MF: The greatest challenge, I think, would be the perception of CRM in the marketplace. This perception had been generated because CRM systems have historically taken a very long time to implement. Businesses moved a little too quickly in attempting to implement very large CRM strategies, and have been turned off by the upfront costs and disappointed by the returns. ROI calculation is an extremely important factor, as well as business value and time-to-market, and a lot of CRM solutions haven't offered that to clients. KANA's success has come from the fact that our technology is a subset of the CRM space focused on managing customer service channels. Our customers typically take a more systematic approach to implementing our technology: taking on their e-mail problems first, for example, and then moving into chat and Web self-service after they've seen success. We think that's why we have such a large and happy customer base.

NT: We also share with you the view that CRM has not had a good, positive perception. In the last three or four years, I've written a number of editorials explaining that, and all the reasons behind it. I'm glad that you share that view with me. Sometimes, when these new technologies come up, people jump on the bandwagon without knowing what they're doing, and the salespeople promise greater things that could come from CRM adoption; it doesn't happen, and everybody's disappointed.

MF: Absolutely. I think a lot of companies that implemented CRM solutions didn't think about the fact that it also required cultural and business changes

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within the company and how they approached their customers. In some cases, it required different skills within their call centers that they didn't have. Technology is never a panacea on its own in solving a significant business issue. It's a great tool and vehicle for solving it, but it requires extensive personnel training and development to make it work, and a commitment from the leadership of the company.

NT: I couldn't agree with you more. Again, I've written a number of editorials saying that it's the people and the training that's really going to make it successful. People don't understand the technology, they don't know how to use it properly and they don't have the right skills. It won't work that way.

MF: I know from reading your editorials over the years that you absolutely believe that, and it's an important criterion. For those of us who have been in the business a long time, success comes when a corporation internalizes the business benefits of technology and there is executive-level sponsorship. It almost never works when it's just an issue for solving something at line management and the company doesn't view it as being strategic.

NT: I agree. In your opinion, what is the greatest need of our industry?

MF: In the customer service software market, we think it's a combination of an integrated, multichannel approach to customer service, as well as highly scalable applications capable of supporting this environment. We think those elements are very important in combination. You can't support only one channel of access to your customer. Rather, you need to support all the channels in an integrated approach, so that when a contact center agent is responding to a customer, that agent has at his or her fingertips all interactions with that customer regardless of whether those interactions came from e-mail, chat sessions or Web self-service — it's all available to the agent. To do this effectively on an integrated basis, you must have systems that are highly scalable. Frankly, we think we are the leader in offering highly scalable, enterprise-class, multichannel customer service solutions.

NT: Could you share with us some of the new developments at your company?

MF: Certainly. The first thing we're doing is streamlining the company and maintaining better focus around our strengths and our dedication to our customers. Some years ago, this company made a decision to offshore the development process for its core products. In December of last year, I made a decision to bring product development back onshore — we call it "backshoring." We've done this to be more nimble, more flexible and to drive more product innovation. By combining our development organizations into one entity, we believe we've gained in communication efficiency and in teamwork. In an offshore environment, where you have your programming done where your architects aren't, you tend to lose more time-to-market and frankly, it tends to cost more because you need more oversight and management of the process. So, we brought ours home, and we're hiring in Menlo Park [California] and in Manchester, New Hampshire. Through that, we're developing a much more efficient and focused team to continue to deliver the best technology on the market.

NT: You used to offshore or outsource your development before now, and you have brought it back to the U.S.?

MF: Yes. We outsourced it to Asia, and it just wasn't working for us in terms of cost, efficiency and time-to-market. By "backshoring" it, we're starting to see those relative gains take place. Actually, it reduced cost. I think with outsourcing, companies have looked at only one layer of the problem: the fact that an engineer in India, for example, costs significantly less than the equivalent talented engineer in California. There's no question about that; the cost is less by a magnitude of three to four times. However, when you add all the other associated costs, such as communication, oversight, additional quality assurance and documentation, and the time-to-market issues you create by separating the architects from the programmers, you end up spending more time and almost as much money, and you don't meet your time-to-market goals.

NT: You've hit on an issue that is very close to my heart. On the call center side, a lot of people are disappointed with offshore outsourcing and coming back to the U.S. We continue to get complaints about what is happening offshore.

MF: Another factor is turnover. There is tremendous turnover taking place in [outsourced] organizations. Since these are not your employees, it's very difficult to manage and control turnover. With your own employees, you can manage that turnover better. I'm not against globalization, and I'm not against large companies that have established offshore entities for development with their own employees. But for a company of our size, where our mission is to deliver the best and most complete solutions for customer service, we've done the math, and it costs us no less money. But we've lost a lot of time to market.

The other major new development in the company is our shift toward more of a sales- and marketing-focused culture in the company. This company has a long history and has been successful in developing a strong customer base, but what we didn't have was a sales and marketing focus. We had very few sales people. We had no concise and organized marketing campaign. We're now

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really starting to figure out how to do real marketing for the company.

NT: As I've said in many editorials, many technology companies love to develop a better mousetrap only to find that the mouse died 15 years ago. They don't know why the product doesn't sell. They need to collaborate with the marketing department to find out if the market really needs this product.

MF: That starts with having a strong marketing department, which we really didn't have before. So, we're making these changes in the U.S., Europe and Asia. We're branding KANA for what it is: the leader in highly scaleable multichannel customer service solutions. We believe that no one else can compete with that message.

NT: How would you describe the current status of customer interaction and CRM in the business? We've touched on it, but would you like to make any other comments?

MF: There's a tremendous opportunity still. We've both been in this business for a while, and seen a lot of different cycles. I believe this whole customer service world within CRM is in a cycle similar to what we saw with the relational database market. In the early days, there was a lot of money spent, but few results. Then, over time, companies began to realize how to get results by having a relational environment. It began to change platform types, and before we knew it, that market skyrocketed because there was real business value generated by the implementation of relational database management. I think we're going to see a similar cycle with the customer service world of CRM. We started off with a bang. A lot of companies spent a lot of money. They didn't get the value for that money back. But now, as they've started to settle and they start changing the organizations in order to match them up against the technology, they're starting to see the business value. The vast majority of our customers can now tell you how they are gaining specific business value from the implementation of our technology. Not just technical value, but how they are increasing productivity by 70 percent among their call center agents. How they're reducing their average hold time and average handle time for customers by 50 or 60 percent. How they're improving their sales to customers who have had a service call, because the service call experience was so good. Those value points are now beginning to get recognized, and I think it's going to cause an explosion of utilization of this level of technology in the market in the future.

Productivity improves two ways. If you have knowledge and you give the agent easy access to that knowledge, then you reduce your training time. The other is the multichannel element; so, our customers using both our IQ and Response products, for example, are finding that the multichannel environment gives their agents information more quickly and completely about the customer interaction.

NT: What is your vision for the future and trends in our industry?

MF: It starts with a particular premise that we have. I call it "the commoditization of everything." There are so many product types and markets in global business today that are now commodities that didn't use to be before. Or, there are new markets that customers treat as commodities. I have an example. If you're interested in a mutual fund, how would you, as an individual…an average person...discern the difference between Vanguard and Fidelity? I think, frankly, that there are only 50 people in the world who could discern the difference, and since Alan Greenspan retired, there are now only 49. So why would you buy Vanguard? It's the customer service, not the product. How does Vanguard treat you and give you information, and how do you communicate with them? All those things are going to determine whether you'll do business with Vanguard for mutual funds. It's not going to be the mutual fund, because you can't really tell the difference. We think that this "commoditization of everything" is permeating significant markets. Look at the telecommunications market, particularly now with the advent of being able to move your number in the cellular space. Why would you stay with Verizon versus Cingular? Certainly the network is important, but all of them are reaching a point of [parity in their] network capabilities, so it's going to be about customer experience. We think that the trend for technology is: how do you improve the customer experience for your customer's customer?

I call it my "Singapore Airlines experience." In 1998, I had the opportunity to fly on Singapore Airlines first-class to Asia from San Francisco. It was a great flight...wonderful service. When I fly, I usually order a Virgin Mary to drink. I didn't return from my trip on Singapore Airlines, and I didn't fly them again until 2002. Once again, I was in first-class going to Asia. When I sat down in my seat in San Francisco, the flight attendant came up with a Virgin Mary in her hand and asked, "Mr. Fields...are you still having your Virgin Mary?" That is truly focusing on the individual customer experience. I think that in this commoditized world, that kind of personalization for customer interactions is going to be necessary, not just for a select subset of a customer base, but for all of our clients' customers. That's why, not only does the technology need to be multichannel, but it has to be highly scalable, as well. That's the only way you're going to be able to manage the amount of data necessary to support that level of customer interaction.

NT: Thank you very much for your time, sir. CIS

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Aspect Software
- Innovation TMC Labs 2005 Award
- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- Speech Technology 2006 TMC Excellence Award
- IP Contact Center 2006 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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etalk
- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- Speech Technology 2006 TMC Excellence Award
- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
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- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- IP Contact Center 2006 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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Interactive Intelligence
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Mercom
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NICE Systems
- Speech Technology 2006 TMC Excellence Award
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Nortel Networks
- Innovation TMC Labs 2005 Award
- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- Speech Technology 2006 TMC Excellence Award
- IP Contact Center 2006 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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- Seal of TMC 2006 Approval

SER Solutions Inc.
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- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- Speech Technology 2005 TMC Excellence Award
- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
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Siebel Systems
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Spectrum Corporation
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- IP Contact Center 2005 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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Stratasoft, Inc.
- IP Contact Center 2005 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
- Seal of TMC 2006 Approval

Strategic Contact Solutions, Inc.
- IP Contact Center 2005 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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Telephony@Work
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- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- IP Contact Center 2006 TMC Technology Pioneer Award
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Verint Systems
- Speech Technology 2006 TMC Excellence Award
- Customer Inter@ction Solutions Product of the Year 2005
- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
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VoiceLog LLC
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Witness Systems
- CRM Excellence TMC Award 2006
- Innovation TMC Labs 2005 Award
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By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

West To Be Acquired By Private Investors

West Corp. (news - alert) has announced that it has entered a definitive agreement to be acquired by a group of private investors led by **Thomas H. Lee Partners** and **Quadrangle Group**. The deal is reported to be worth $4.1 billion. Under the agreement, the investors would pay $48.75 per share in cash to stockholders of West Corp. Founders **Gary** and **Mary West** are not included in this list of stockholders. The couple own approximately 56 percent of the company's outstanding stock, 85 percent of which would be purchased at $42.83 per share in cash. The remaining shares are expected to be converted into stock of the new corporation upon completion of the merger.

West Corporation's board of directors, on the recommendation of a special committee of independent directors, has approved the merger agreement and recommends that West's stockholders adopt the agreement. Gary and Mary West have agreed under certain circumstances to vote their shares in favor of the transaction. **Thomas B. Barker**, CEO of West Corporation, has stated that in addition to providing West's public stockholders a premium for their shares, the company believes the transaction is also in the best interest of the company's employees and customers.

In other West news, West Interactive (news - alert) has introduced Insight Customer Intelligence, a network-based, real-time automated customer survey tool designed to measure the quality of customer interactions and improve customer retention. Using West's interactive voice response (IVR) infrastructure, Insight gives customers the choice to participate in a brief survey immediately following their interaction with the customer service agent. With Insight, contact center management and operations can access customer feedback in near real-time through a Web-based portal that integrates the customer's satisfaction rating, including spoken comments, with a 100 percent recording of the actual agent call. The survey is controlled by the caller and is anonymous to the agent. Based on the customer's satisfaction score, Insight can also dynamically request if the customer would like a callback or be transferred for immediate assistance.

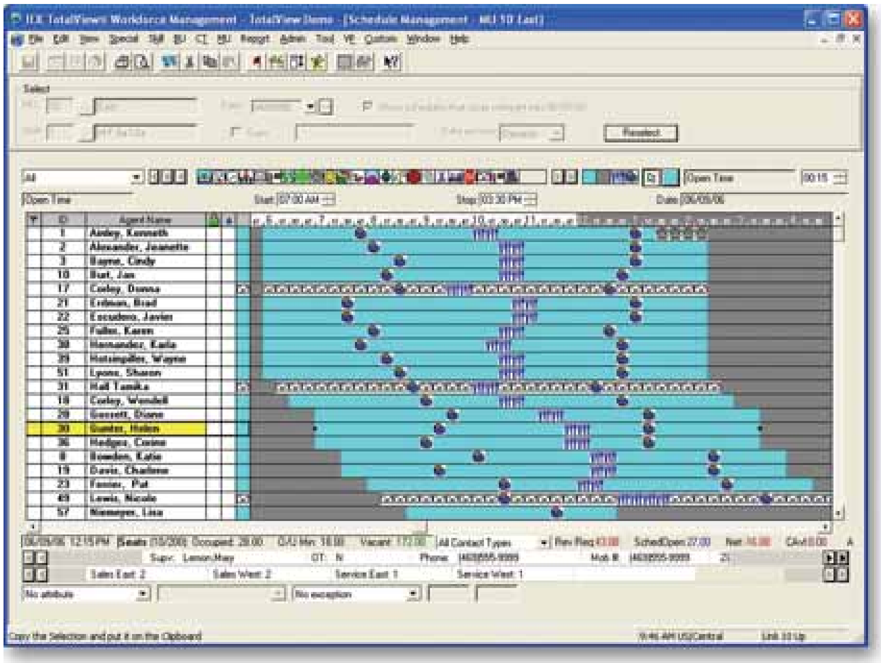
http://www.west.com and **http://www.westinteractive.com**

IEX Introduces Version 3.11 Of TotalView Workforce Management

IEX Corp. (news - alert) has announced the general availability of version 3.11 of its TotalView Workforce Management system. TotalView v3.11 introduces new features designed to meet global contact centers' unique scheduling requirements and boost agent empowerment. Key feature in this release include: Team Scheduling, Seat Limit Scheduling, Holiday Fairness, Day of Week Fairness and Schedule Trading enhancements.

Team Scheduling offers contact centers the ability to schedule a team of agents to work at the same time, while having the flexibility to work different schedules as a group from week-to-week. This eliminates the need to use static work patterns for weeks or months at a time to keep supervisors and their teams working the same shift. Seat Limit Scheduling allows the center to set minimum and maximum seating parameters for a given site. This prevents the center from scheduling more agents than there are seats available, and allows the organization to establish a minimum staffing level for periods of low contact volume. Holiday Fairness allows the center to automatically assign holiday schedules on a rotation basis by taking into account holiday work history for each agent. The existing Day of Week Fairness process has been enhanced to consider day of week and weekend assignments simultaneously. This allows the organization to take into account work history that ensures days off and weekend assignments are distributed equitably. Schedule Trading is a WebStation enhancement that adds more flexibility into the agent schedule trade process with hands-off administration by providing both "closed" and "open" trading. Instead of posting an "open" trade request on the board and waiting to see if someone accepts, agents can now work out an agreement in advance and conduct a specific agent swap online.

http://www.iex.com



IEX TotalView Workforce Management - TotalView Demo - [Schedule Management - MU 10 East]
File Edit View Special Skill BU CT MU Report Admin Tool VE Custom Window Help
Reselect
Open Time
Copy the Selection and put it on the Clipboard

ID	Agent Name
1	Ainley, Kenneth
2	Alexander, Jeanette
3	Bayne, Cindy
10	Burt, Jim
17	Cooley, Donna
21	Erdman, Brad
22	Escudero, Javier
25	Fuller, Karen
30	Hernandez, Karla
39	Hotsinpiller, Wayne
51	Lyons, Sharon
31	Hall Tamika
18	Cooley, Wendell
28	Garrett, Diane
30	Gunter, Helen
36	Hedges, Corine
8	Bowden, Katie
19	Davis, Charlene
23	Fenner, Pat
49	Lewis, Nicole
57	Niemeyer, Lisa

Onyx Agrees To Be Acquired By M2M Holdings Inc.

Onyx Software Corporation (news - alert) has announced that it has signed a definitive agreement to be acquired by privately held **M2M Holdings Inc.**, the holding company that is jointly owned by **Battery Ventures VI, L.P.** and **Thoma Cressey Equity Partners** and whose primary asset is **Made2Manage Systems Inc.**, an enterprise software and services company, in an all-cash transaction valued at $4.80 per share, or approximately $92 million. The parties anticipate closing the transaction in the third calendar quarter of 2006. The closing i subject to approval by holders of a majority of Onyx's outstanding common stock and other customary regulatory and documentation closing conditions. Certain Onyx directors and officers, representing approximately 17.6 percent of Onyx's outstanding shares, have entered into voting agreements in support of the acquisition.

"We believe that this transaction is the right decision for Onyx shareholders, customers, partners and employees," said **Janice P. Anderson**, chairman and CEO of Onyx. "Upon closing, this acquisition will provide liquidity to shareholders and a premium to our recent trading prices. Battery Ventures and Thoma Cressey Equity Partners, Made2Manage Systems' equity sponsors, each have a strong track record of supporting the growth of their portfolio companies and we believe will use their proven industry consolidation experience to help Onyx increase its share of the enterprise CRM market."

http://www.onyx.com

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Cisco Announces Two Acquisitions

Cisco Systems, Inc. (quote - news - alert) has announced a definitive agreement to acquire the privately-held companies **Metreos Corp.** of Austin, TX and **Audium Corp.** of New York, NY in two separate deals. With these acquisitions, Cisco will be able to further help enterprise customers turn their Internet protocol (IP) networks into true unified communications systems for handling all voice, video, data and mobility communications applications.

In March 2006, Cisco announced its Unified Communications system, which allows enterprise customers to integrate their communications systems with their IT infrastructure, creating a single enterprisewide communications platform. The Cisco Unified Communications system of voice, video and IP communications products and applications enables organizations of all sizes to communicate more effectively, streamline business processes, reach the right resource the first time and positively impact the top and bottom line.

Metreos and Audium provide network-based application development environments and run-time platforms for two different market segments, IP communications and IP contact center, respectively. Over time, the Metreos and Audium product portfolios will be integrated with each other to provide one unified common application development interface for all Cisco Unified Communications, enabling customers and partners to rapidly build customized communications applications that are fully integrated across the enterprise IT infrastructure, enterprise applications and enterprise contact centers.

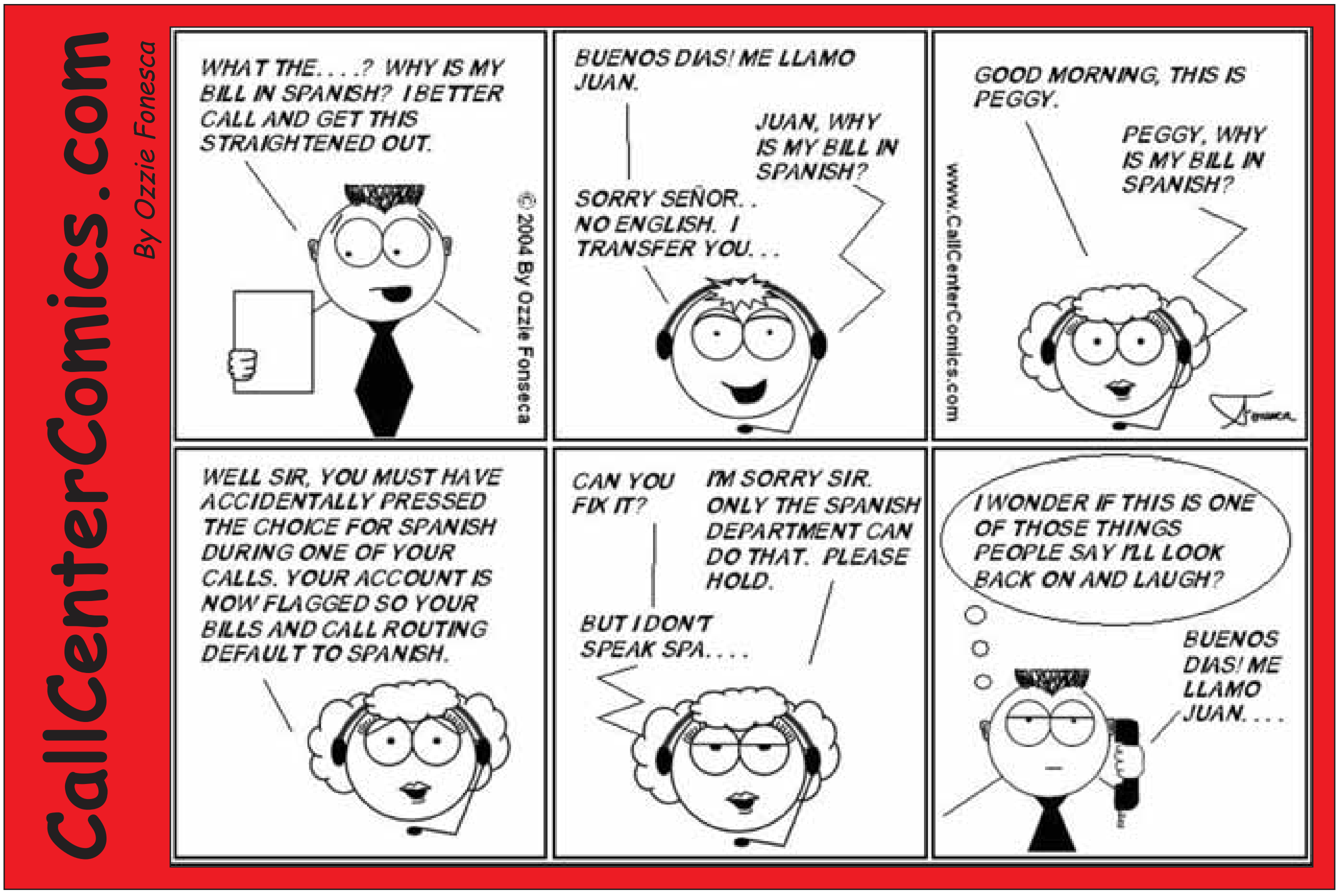
http://www.cisco.com

Aspect Software Offering Unison Predictive Dialer 7.1

Aspect Software, Inc. (news - alert) has announced the general availability of Aspect Unison Predictive Dialer 7.1, a comprehensive outbound contact center solution. The latest version offers new features designed to improve flexibility and simplify system maintenance, as well as greatly expanded security capabilities to provide increased protection of customer information during call handling.

From the company's Signature product line, Aspect Unison Predictive Dialer 7.1 incorporates significant security updates to accommodate emerging industry requirements. Examples of these include the Aspect Unison Security Portal, which provides the option for customers to have their agents and supervisors authenticate against Microsoft Active Directory or Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) or to continue to use the internal Aspect Unison Predictive Dialer authentication process; full user account control, which enables administrators to access and manage all Unix, application and database user accounts, including password creation, resetting and formatting; and support for Citrix Presentation Server 4.0 for customers using Citrix for their networking and distributed application management.

http://www.aspect.com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GOOD MORNING, THIS IS PEGGY.
PEGGY, WHY IS MY BILL IN SPANISH?
WELL SIR, YOU MUST HAVE ACCIDENTALLY PRESSED THE CHOICE FOR SPANISH DURING ONE OF YOUR CALLS. YOUR ACCOUNT IS NOW FLAGGED SO YOUR BILLS AND CALL ROUTING DEFAULT TO SPANISH.
CAN YOU FIX IT?
I'M SORRY SIR. ONLY THE SPANISH DEPARTMENT CAN DO THAT. PLEASE HOLD.
BUT I DON'T SPEAK SPA....
I WONDER IF THIS IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS PEOPLE SAY I'LL LOOK BACK ON AND LAUGH?
BUENOS DIAS! ME LLAMO JUAN....

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PossibleNOW Adds To Consulting And Audit Services

PossibleNOW, (news - alert) a provider of Internet-based privacy preference management solutions and services, has announced the Do Not Call Safe Harbor Assessment, a new service of its Consulting & Audit Services Group. The Do Not Call Safe Harbor Assessment helps companies determine if they have achieved a do-not-call safe harbor position. PossibleNOW's Consulting & Audit Services Group assists companies involved in consumer marketing to ensure they are in full compliance with state and federal do-not-call laws. The Do Not Call Safe Harbor Assessment service is particularly beneficial for smaller companies that may not need one of PossibleNOW's more comprehensive compliance audits.

The Do Not Call (DNC) Safe Harbor Assessment identifies a company's compliance risk and defines the immediate steps required to achieve a do-not-call safe harbor position. Operating within safe harbor parameters greatly reduces the likelihood that a company will have violations. If an error does result in a violation and the company is found to be within the DNC safe harbor requirements, the company is not liable for the violation. PossibleNOW's compliance experts visit the client and investigate the company's compliance processes as they relate to the requirements of achieving the do-not-call safe harbor. Upon completion of the assessment, the client receives a comprehensive report including a risk assessment, gap analysis and recommendations for compliance. PossibleNOW also includes a compliance data analysis of a current or historical calling campaign.

http://www.possiblenow.com or **http://www.dncsolution.com**

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AnswerNet Acquires S&D, Plans To Boost Business

The AnswerNet Network, (news - alert) a contact center and telemessaging outsourcer, has acquired Philadelphia-based outsourcer **S&D Marketing** for an undisclosed sum. AnswerNet had held a 50 percent stake in S&D. The deal is expected to enhance AnswerNet's telemarketing, customer service and direct response capabilities. It also fully integrates S&D's operations with AnswerNet's to provide a seamless suite of services. The S&D contact center, (now known as AnswerNet-Philadelphia) has 120 workstations, a predictive dialer and an IVR. It currently supports a range of applications, and is experienced at selling high-speed Internet, cable television and digital telephone services.

With AnswerNet-Philadelphia a part of the network, clients now have the option of having their large-scale outbound telemarketing and inbound CRM applications supplied at a single contact center. They can tap additional sites for overflow or disaster backup.

http://www.answernet.com

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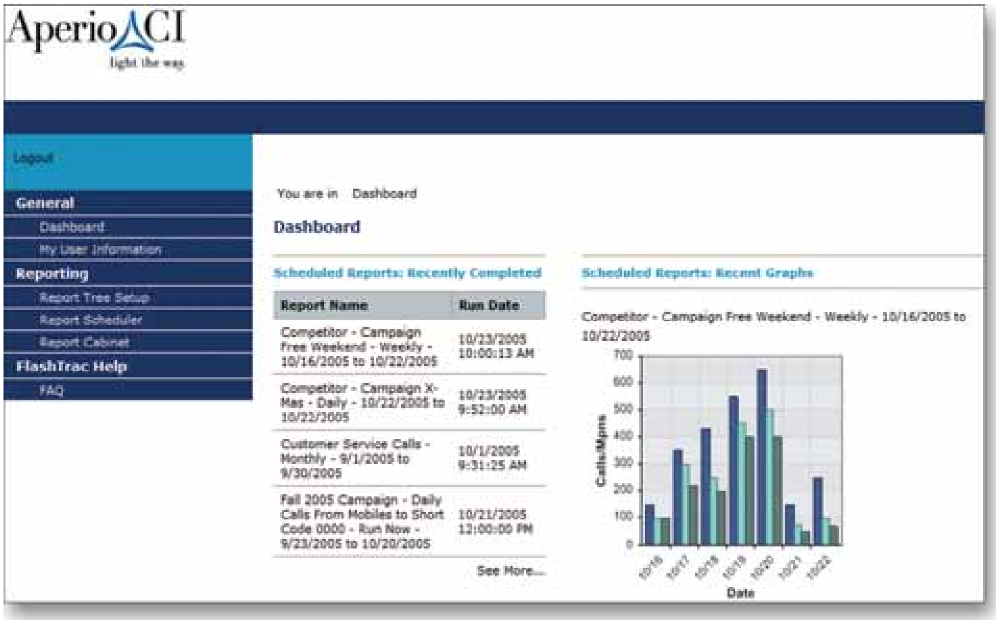
Aperio CI Releases FlashTrac

Aperio CI, (news - alert) a provider of customer acquisition and retention solutions for consumer-facing enterprises, has released FlashTrac, a near real-time software solution designed to convert historical usage data into business intelligence quickly and efficiently. Through FlashTrac, service providers can identify, evaluate and respond to aggregate customer behavioral patterns within hours of a specified event. A fully reliable, secure and scalable software application, FlashTrac can be integrated with various enterprise customer relationship management (CRM) applications. It is currently available as a hosted solution.

The FlashTrac platform consists of five integrated modules: Data Collection and Conversion, which collects data from client systems, performs confirmation and authentication, and converts data into Aperio's format for analysis; Report Management, a self-administrative module that allows users to add/change/delete phone numbers to be tracked and organize them into groups; Business Rules Management, which allows for customization and parameter control to manage and customize analysis; Data Event Processing, Aperio CI's proprietary analysis engine that structures and applies business logic; and Report Processing, which creates both standard daily, weekly and monthly reports overnight, and immediate ad hoc reports.

http://www.aperioci.com



You are in Dashboard

Dashboard

Scheduled Reports: Recently Completed

Report Name	Run Date
Competitor - Campaign Free Weekend - Weekly - 10/16/2005 to 10/22/2005	10/23/2005 10:00:13 AM
Competitor - Campaign X-Mas - Daily - 10/22/2005 to 10/22/2005	10/23/2005 9:52:00 AM
Customer Service Calls - Monthly - 9/1/2005 to 9/30/2005	10/1/2005 9:31:25 AM
Fall 2005 Campaign - Daily Calls From Mobiles to Short Code 0000 - Run Now - 9/23/2005 to 10/20/2005	10/21/2005 12:00:00 PM

See More...

Scheduled Reports: Recent Graphs

Competitor - Campaign Free Weekend - Weekly - 10/16/2005 to 10/22/2005

HigherGround And SER Announce Partnership

HigherGround, Inc., (news - alert) a software developer of call recording, data collection and business intelligence tools, and **SER Solutions, Inc.**, (news - alert) a provider of enterprise contact center management and speech analytics solutions, recently announced a strategic partnership. HigherGround has integrated SER's speech analytics solution, SERTAINTY, with its Fusion Series 7 product suite of call recording and reporting solutions. HigherGround will represent SER's SERTAINTY, a speech analytics solution that captures customer conversations and transforms them into rich metadata allowing identification, discovery, assessment and management of the dialog. Information hidden in customer conversations is extracted to better understand customer needs and market trends. SERTAINTY also analyzes and scores recorded calls for script adherence, achievement of KPIs and fraud detection. With SERTAINTY's ability to automatically mine and pinpoint exact phrases from within audio files, companies can reduce their costs by eliminating tedious and error-prone manual monitoring activities.

http://www.ser.com and http://www.highergroundinc.com

Tangoe Opens European Headquarters

Tangoe, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of enterprise telecommunications expense management (TEM) software and services, has announced the opening of its first European office, located in Manchester, England. Tangoe established the office in support of its expanding partner and client activities in the region. More specifically, the new office will provide a base of operations for sales, service and support activities, allowing the company to respond more effectively to the increasing number of customers and partners throughout Europe.

"We began our European business development opportunities in the fourth quarter of 2005 and have already engaged in a number of active TEM projects in the UK, BeNeLux and Germany," said **Al Subbloie**, Tangoe CEO and president. "As a result, opening our first European location quickly became a key requirement to supporting our growing base of customers and partners."

http://www.tangoe.com

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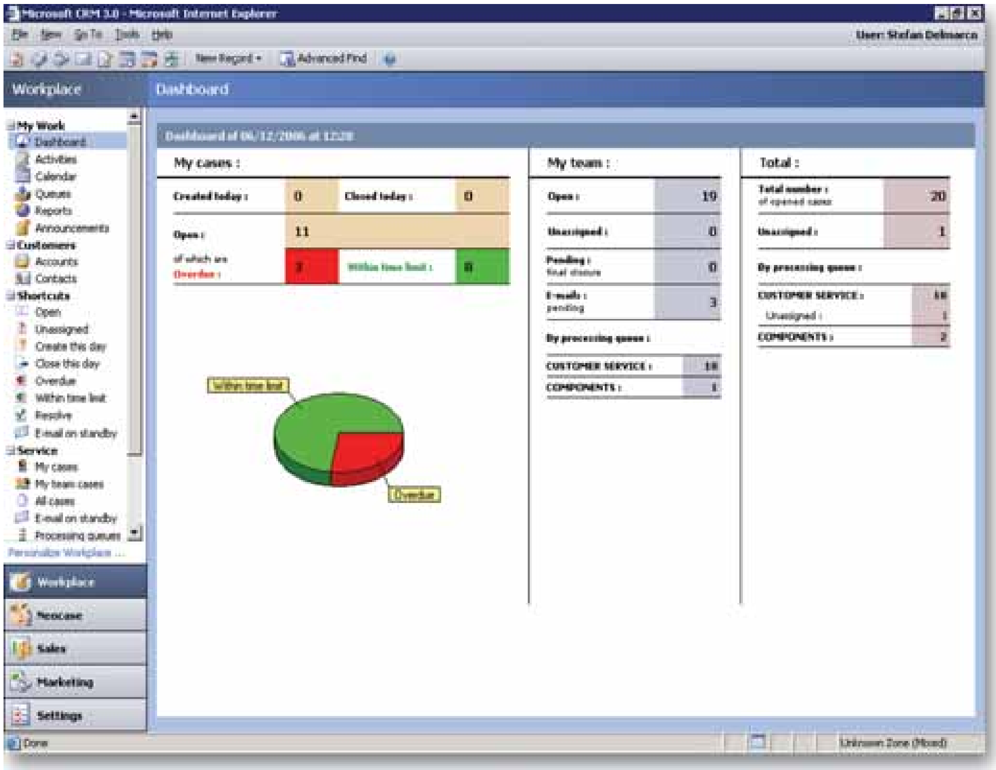
Neocase Launches New Collaborative Customer Operations Software Suite

Neocase Software, (news - alert) a collaborative customer operations specialists, has announced the availability of the newest version of its CRM offerings, Neocase 10, for the U.S. mid-market.

An established European provider of CRM, Neocase delivers applications designed to take customer service to a new level by transforming a company and its external partners into a customer service team. Neocase provides all relevant business units with direct, customized access for solving each customer issue. Through its collaborative approach, Neocase streamlines business processes and enables customer service agents to solve problems quickly, ultimately improving overall customer service quality and customer satisfaction.

Neocase 10 helps maximize productivity and quality of customer service through collaboration, knowledge management and more efficient workflow management. It provides a collaborative customer service platform comprised of seven modules that function synergistically for efficient case resolution.

www.neocase-software.com


Microsoft CRM 3.0 - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File
View
Go To
Tools
Help
User: Stefan Delmarco
New Record
Advanced Find
Workplace
Dashboard
My Work
Dashboard
Activities
Calendar
Queues
Reports
Announcements
Customers
Accounts
Contacts
Shortcuts
Open
Unassigned
Create this day
Close this day
Overdue
Within time limit
Resolve
E-mail on standby
Service
My cases
My team cases
All cases
E-mail on standby
Processing queues
Personalize Workplace ...
Workplace
Neocase
Sales
Marketing
Settings
Within time limit
Overdue
Done
Unknown Zone (Mixed)

Dashboard of 06/12/2006 at 12:20

My cases :

Created today : 0
Closed today : 0
Open : 11
of which are Overdue : 3
Within time limit : 8

My team :

Open : 19
Unassigned : 0
Pending : final closure 0
E-mails : pending 3
By processing queue :
CUSTOMER SERVICE : 18
COMPONENTS : 1

Total :

Total number : of opened cases 20
Unassigned : 1
By processing queue :
CUSTOMER SERVICE : 18
Unassigned : 1
COMPONENTS : 2

Inter-Tel Releases Inter-Tel Audio And Web Conferencing Version 2.0

Inter-Tel, Incorporated (news - alert) has announced the release of Inter-Tel Audio and Web Conferencing Version 2.0, an IP-based collaboration solution that combines voice and video capabilities developed to facilitate cost-effective, interactive online conferences. The new collaboration tool was designed to provide quality voice communications by tightly integrating with Inter-Tel's Axxess and Inter-Tel 5000 series communications platforms. Complementing the rollout of this latest addition to Inter-Tel's suite of products is the availability of Inter-Tel Web Conferencing and Remote Support 4.5, an updated version of its premise-based customer support and collaboration solution. These business applications are designed to address the dynamic communications and workflow demands of businesses, allowing them to increase productivity and improve efficiency.

Inter-Tel Audio and Web Conferencing v.2.0 delivers a one-two combination developed to enable anyone with a computer, Internet connection and Web browser to conduct or join a meeting from virtually anywhere. Through the Inter-Tel Audio Conferencing portion of the application, users can create and manage audio conferences, meetings and training sessions.

http://www.inter-tel.com

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Back Search Favorites
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Go Links
Google Search 26 blocked Check AutoLink Options
TMCnet On the Web
Communications
Contact Center Research
[new rules for IP business communication]
[old rule] "IP-enabled" is close enough.
[new rule] Buy an IP system, not a label.
Interactive Intelligence Inc® | Deliberately Innovative
Blogs:
Rich Tehrani
Tom Keating
Greg Galitzine
SIPThat
Al Bredenberg
Call Center/CRM
...more
CHANNELS
SERVICE PROVIDER
ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPER
RESELLER
GOVERNMENT
CONSUMER
About TMC
TMCnet Services
Advertise
Blogs
News Alerts XML
Free eNews
Events
Publications
Whitepapers
Content Submission
Subscribe Today!
SIP
Channels Home
VoIP
Home
VoIP
CRM
Call Center
Information Technology
IP Communications
VoIP for SMB
Contact Center Research
What's New
Events
Publications
Forums
Contributors
Type your search here
Go!
VoIP Forums
General, FAQs, How to
Termination, Origination, Want Ads, Barter
Asterisk Forum : User Community
Sipura Technology Forum : User Community
Skype Forum
Triple Play Forum
Call Center Forums
General, FAQs, How to
Wanted Ads/Classifieds
WiMAX Forum
Products & Solutions
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Interactive Intelligence
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Contact Center Analysis
See All Analysis
Contact Center White Papers
[new rules for IP business communication]
Register for a Free Half Day Seminar
Keynote presented by Rich Tehrani, President of TMC®
Interactive Intelligence Inc. Deliberately Innovative
Visit www.inin.com for a list of upcoming dates and cities near you
[new rules for IP business communication]
[old rule] Efficient call routing is good enough.
[new rule] Agent effectiveness will boost your bottom line.
http://voip-forum.tmcnet.com/voip-forum/forum/
Internet

Analysis: Nice Systems Acquires IEX and Performix
May 04,2006

Outsourced Call Centers: The Realities of Globaliz...
April 28,2006

Technology Still Matters in the Contact Center
April 28,2006

Three Easy Steps to Improve your Call ...
April 24,2006

IVR and the Great Disconnect
April 20,2006

SAP Enters On-demand CRM Market
April 19,2006

Technical Developments Are Broadening Customer Rel...
April 17,2006

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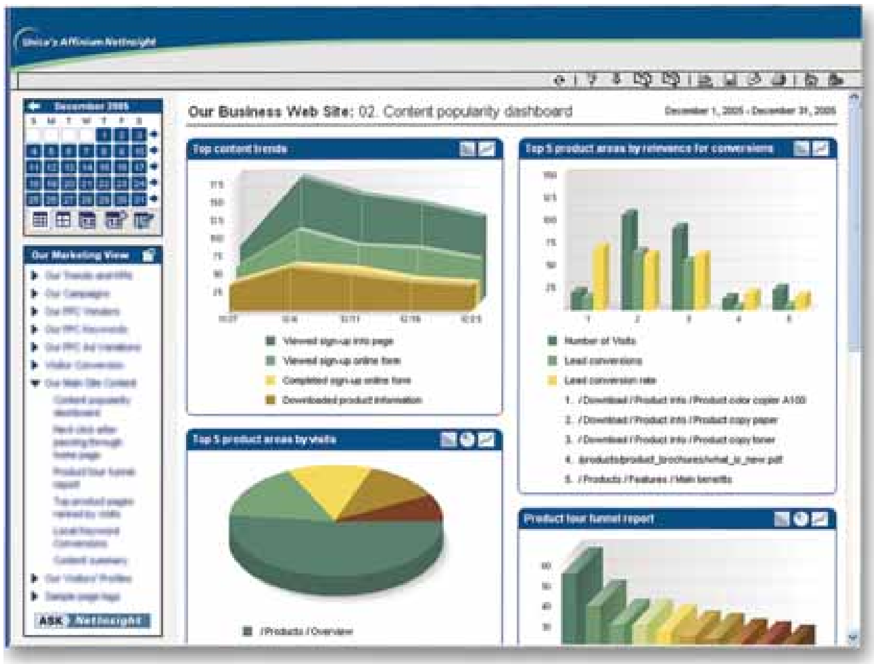
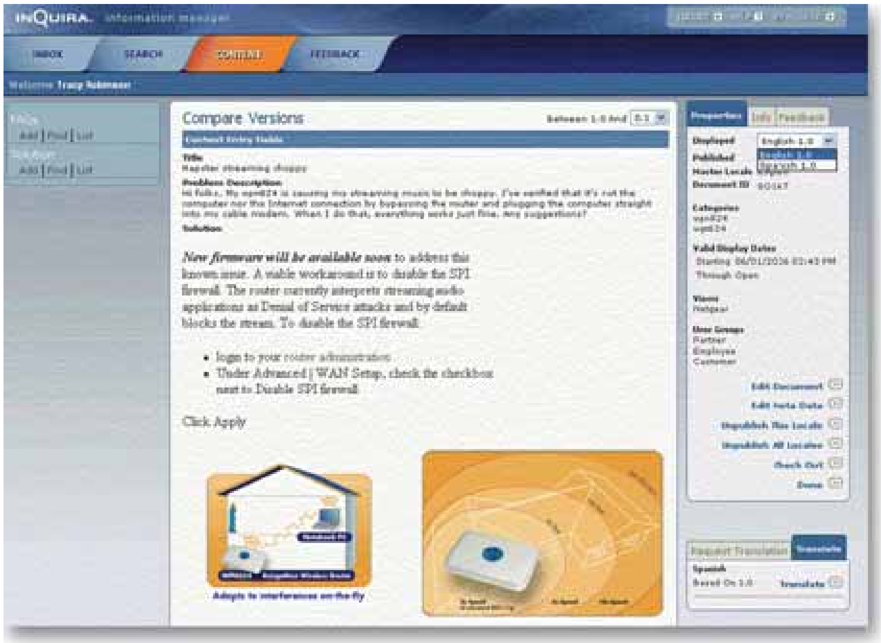
Unica Introduces Affinium NetInsight

Unica Corporation, (news - alert) a provider of enterprise marketing management (EMM) solutions, recently announced the introduction of Affinium NetInsight for enterprises seeking to optimize Web sites, Internet marketing and the cross-channel experience for their customers and prospects. With Affinium NetInsight, Web analytics can be integrated with other customer data across the enterprise to create a comprehensive view of customers and their preferences. The open architecture facilitates easy integration of the Web analytics data warehouse with legacy business intelligence solutions. Externally-stored customer and product data are integrated into reports generated by Affinium NetInsight, helping improve report usability and value. Additionally, when marketers use Affinium NetInsight in conjunction with other modules in Unica's Affinium Suite, they can automate precision marketing based on their Web and cross-channel knowledge and close the loop across customer touch points, delivering speed to market and improved results.
http://www.unica.com


Unica's Affinium NetInsight
December 2005
Our Marketing View
ASK NetInsight
Our Business Web Site: 02. Content popularity dashboard
Top content trends
Viewed sign-up info page
Viewed sign-up online form
Completed sign-up online form
Downloaded product information
Top 5 product areas by relevance for conversions
Number of Visits
Lead conversions
Lead conversion rate
Top 5 product areas by visits
/Products / Overview
Product tour funnel report

InQuira Announces Version 7.3

InQuira Inc., (news - alert) a provider of integrated software applications for intelligent search, knowledge management, analytics and user experience, recently announced the general availability of InQuira 7.3. The release includes additions to InQuira's knowledge management product, InQuira Information Manager 7.3. It features enhancements for multi-language content and localization; content integration via Web services APIs; workflow process improvements; content usage analytics, embedded InQuira Intelligent Search; and user reputation models. According to the company, global support organizations will appreciate the new multi-language and localization features in InQuira 7.3. The new release enables companies to share content across regions, to allow localized control and publishing workflows and to more effectively manage translation workflows.


INQUIRA information manager
INBOX
SEARCH
CONTENT
FEEDBACK
Properties
Info
Feedback
Request Translation
Translate

Compare Versions

Problem Description
Hi folks, My wgr824 is causing my streaming music to be choppy. I've verified that it's not the computer nor the Internet connection by bypassing the router and plugging the computer straight into my cable modem. When I do that, everything works just fine. Any suggestions?

Solution

New firmware will be available soon to address this known issue. A viable workaround is to disable the SPI firewall. The router currently interprets streaming audio applications as Denial of Service attacks and by default blocks the stream. To disable the SPI firewall:

- login to your router administration
- Under Advanced | WAN Setup, check the checkbox next to Disable SPI firewall

Click Apply

A new Web services API facilitates content migration from external knowledge sources and between content channels within Information Manager. New content can even be dynamically transferred to Information Manager as it is created in other systems. InQuira's Intelligent Search is now embedded within the Information Manager console for locating duplicate content and assessing the relevance of existing or new content in the search results for end users, including content that is stored external to Information Manager. InQuira 7.3 also introduces several new reporting features, including new capabilities to survey users, and usage reports that filter content usage by access type (e.g., searching, newsletters, product home pages).
http://www.inquira.com

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StarTek Unveils StarTek Intelligent Enterprise

BPO provider **StarTek, Inc.** (news - alert) has unveiled StarTek Intelligent Enterprise, the company's suite of complex process management services for the financial and healthcare industries. The financial and healthcare industries will have access to StarTek's custom business services program to gain visibility and control for compliance, improve customer service and achieve greater agility in their increasingly competitive industries. These services are positioned to help transform the pace and process of business process outsourcing.

"Many financial services and healthcare organizations are currently in a position where they are reexamining their businesses and evaluating their processes with the focus on reengineering them," said **Steve Butler**, CEO of StarTek. "Traditional business process definition and technology purchases can be characterized in a manner that often results in sub-optimization, which can lead to situations where multiple processes and technologies are used to perform similar functions. Increased compliance imperatives add to this scenario, which can create the perfect storm. The market is ready for StarTek to offer StarTek Intelligent Enterprise, a total solution for compliance and business process management."

http://www.startek.com

Stratasoft And Call Compliance Partner

Call center solutions provider **Stratasoft, Inc.** (news - alert) recently announced that its StrataDial.VC2 predictive dialer technology has been integrated with **Call Compliance, Inc.'s** (news - alert) TeleBlock system. Stratasoft's StrataDial.VC2 virtual call center software includes a predictive dialing engine built on a robust and mature pacing algorithm that guarantees accurate call progress detection and ensures rapid screen pops and fast voice connects to call center agents. Combining this technology with the TeleBlock system ensures that telemarketers can maximize productivity without having to fear do-not-call and related fines. TeleBlock integrates with Stratasoft's system by enabling instant DNC lookups, from one centralized database, as calls are made by the dialer. All numbers dialed using Stratasoft predictive dialers can now be screened against all appropriate DNC databases including cell phones; if a call is placed to a number appearing on a DNC list, the call is instantly blocked.

http://www.stratasoft.com
http://www.callcompliance.com

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waiting
for?
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Poll Finds Americans Twice As Frustrated With Bad English Than Bad Tech Support

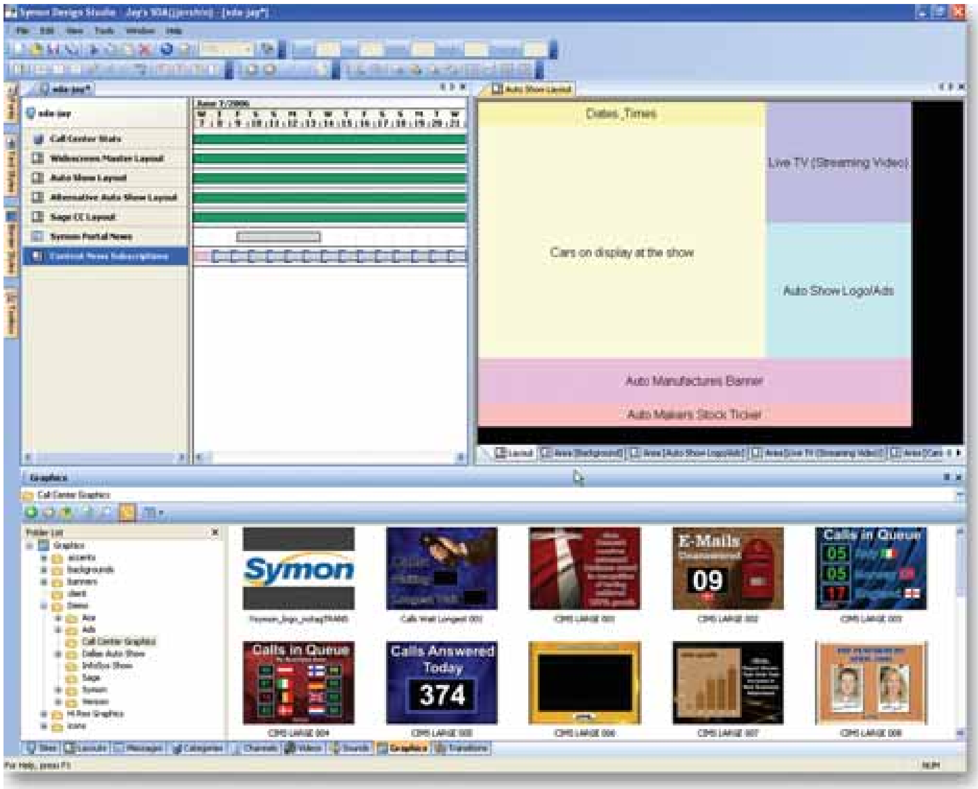
A new international contact center survey has revealed that Americans balk more at customer service agents with hard-to-understand accents than those who don't understand the problem they are calling about. Conducted for **NetReflector**, (news - alert) a provider of enterprise feedback solutions, the research explored customer experiences in nine countries around the world. When asked what frustrates them most about contact centers, U.S. respondents say bad accents (29 percent) are their top complaint, followed by rude or condescending agents (18 percent), being made to wait too long on the line (17 percent) or having to listen to an agent "upgrade" their services (15 percent).

Consumers in non-English-speaking markets rate other issues as more problematic. For example, for French and German consumers, waiting on the phone is the primary problem, while the leading frustration for Chinese and Russian respondents is that contact center personnel are condescending or rude. According to NetReflector, the findings substantiate a growing trend among companies to find alternatives to counter Americans' increasingly hostile attitudes towards overseas contact center agents, including online chat, e-mail and improved automated voice systems that can resolve problems more quickly. Other companies are bringing front-line customer service operations back home, but leaving their back-office processing overseas. Others are investing heavily in "foreign accent reduction therapy."
http://www.netreflector.com

Symon Releases Symon Enterprise Server 9.0

Symon Communications, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of real-time operational performance, productivity and communication applications, has announced the release of Symon Enterprise Server (SES) 9.0 software. SES is a software application that instantly communicates and effectively distributes data and content for viewing on flat panel displays, televisions, wallboards and the desktop.

SES 9.0 allows digital signage users to tailor message content for specific audiences and events in retail and employee communication. Content is instantly viewed on flat panel displays and televisions, providing employees with corporate news, streaming video, LiveTV and crisis communication. Supply chain, contact centers and the enterprise can combine real-time data with content into custom layouts for dynamic views of information and statistics, helping enhance performance and productivity.


Symon Design Studio
Call Center Stats
Widescreen Master Layout
Auto Show Layout
Alternative Auto Show Layout
Sage CC Layout
Symon Portal News
Auto Show Layout
Dates_Times
Live TV (Streaming Video)
Cars on display at the show
Auto Show Logo/Ads
Auto Manufactures Banner
Auto Makers Stock Ticker
Graphics
Call Center Graphics
Folder List
Symon
E-Mails
09
Calls in Queue
Calls Answered Today
374

New features in Symon Design Studio include professional 3D cinematic transitions for all types of content and real-time data events that can change screen layouts and content. Innovative scheduling, drag-and-drop capability for routine tasks, permissions-based security, content posting anywhere to a site, and enhanced play list and message reporting are now available. SES 9.0 users benefit from the addition of Web services for greater interoperability, delivering sophisticated added-value services. The product also supports Symon's newest generation of digital network appliances designed with efficient and professional broadcast technological advancement and refinement.
http://www.symon.com

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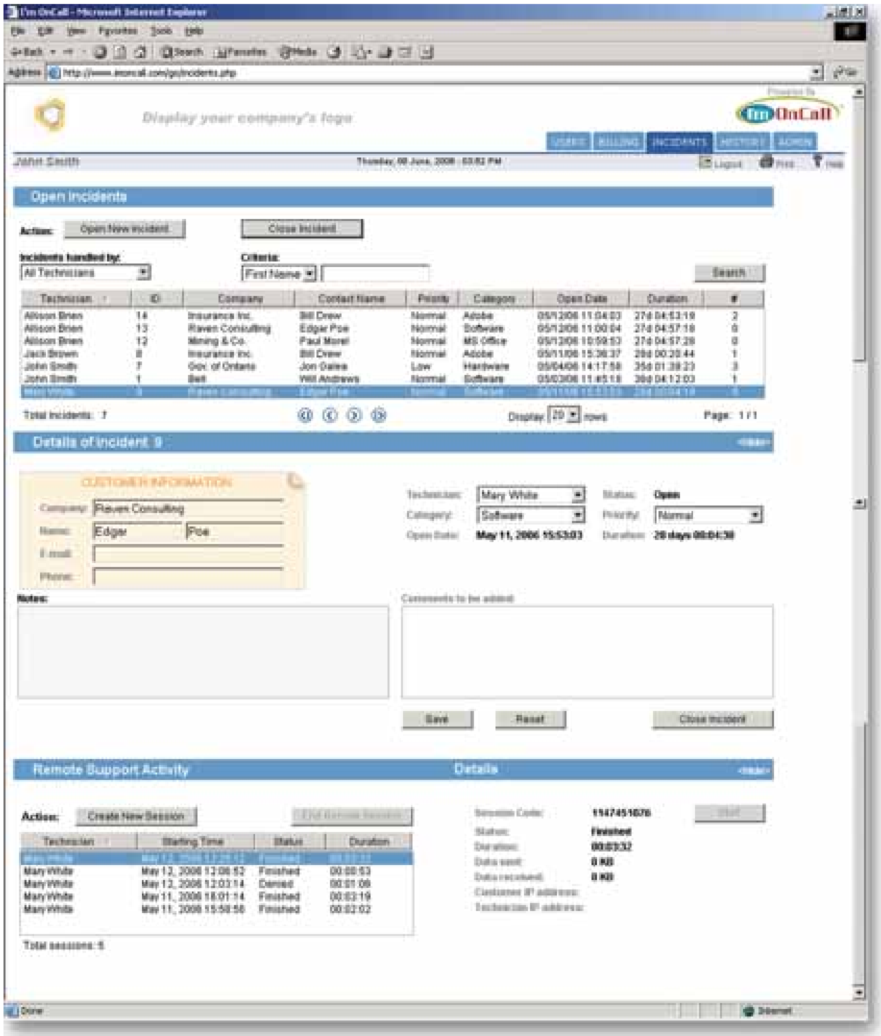
01 Communique Releases On Demand Remote Support Tool

01 Communique Laboratory Inc., (news - alert) a remote access solutions provider, has announced the launch of I'm OnCall, a secure Web-based remote support solution, enabling help desk personnel to more quickly and efficiently support their customers anywhere in the world, through on-demand PC remote control. Upon a support person receiving the customer's permission, I'm OnCall auto-configures a temporary connection between the technician's and the customer's PC, allowing the support person to take full control of the PC. I'm OnCall provides resellers, software and hardware vendors, internal help desks and support organizations with an integral tool for delivering improved customer support and services through reduced call times and cost-effective problem resolution.

I'm OnCall is a complete remote support platform comprised of two modules: the current On Demand module, delivering the ability to automatically connect to a customer's PC across the Internet within seconds of the customer's call; and a Remote Administration module, providing the flexibility to more easily connect to customers' PCs around the world that have preinstalled software on them. I'm OnCall's Remote Admin network console will allow technicians to provide planned or unplanned support to customers with pre-specified service agreements. This module will be incorporated into a future release of I'm OnCall.

http://www.01com.com


I'm OnCall - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites Media
Address http://www.imoncall.com/go/incidents.php
Display your company's logo
I'm OnCall
USERS BILLING INCIDENTS HISTORY ADMIN
Logout Print Help
Done
Internet

John Smith Thursday, 08 June, 2006 - 03:52 PM

Open Incidents

Action: Open New Incident Close Incident

Incidents handled by: All Technicians

Criteria: First Name

Technician	ID	Company	Contact Name	Priority	Category	Open Date	Duration	#
Allison Brien	14	Insurance Inc.	Bill Drew	Normal	Adobe	05/12/06 11:04:03	27d 04:53:19	2
Allison Brien	13	Raven Consulting	Edgar Poe	Normal	Software	05/12/06 11:00:04	27d 04:57:18	0
Allison Brien	12	Mining & Co.	Paul Morel	Normal	MS Office	05/12/06 10:59:53	27d 04:57:28	0
Jack Brown	8	Insurance Inc.	Bill Drew	Normal	Adobe	05/11/06 15:36:37	28d 00:20:44	1
John Smith	7	Gov. of Ontario	Jon Dalea	Low	Hardware	05/04/06 14:17:58	35d 01:38:23	3
John Smith	1	Bell	Will Andrews	Normal	Software	05/03/06 11:45:18	38d 04:12:03	1
Mary White	9	Raven Consulting	Edgar Poe	Normal	Software	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

Total Incidents: 7 Display: 20 rows Page: 1/1

Details of incident 9

CUSTOMER INFORMATION
Company: Raven Consulting
Name: Edgar Poe
E-mail:
Phone:

Technician: Mary White
Status: Open
Category: Software
Priority: Normal
Open Date: May 11, 2006 15:53:03
Duration: 28 days 00:04:38

Notes:

Comments to be added:

Save Reset Close Incident

Remote Support Activity

Action: Create New Session End Remote Session

Technician	Starting Time	Status	Duration
Mary White	[illegible]	Finished	[illegible]
Mary White	May 12, 2006 12:08:52	Finished	00:00:53
Mary White	May 12, 2006 12:03:14	Denied	00:01:08
Mary White	May 11, 2006 18:01:14	Finished	00:03:19
Mary White	May 11, 2006 15:50:56	Finished	00:02:02

Total sessions: 5

Details

Session Code: 1547451676
Status: Finished
Duration: 00:03:32
Data sent: 0 KB
Data received: 0 KB
Customer IP address:
Technician IP address:

Retired Home Depot Executive Named "Direct Marketer Of The Year"

University of Akron alumnus **John Costello**, retired executive VP of merchandising and marketing for **Home Depot**, (news - alert) has received the university's first Direct Marketer of The Year Award. The award is sponsored by UA's **Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing**. Presenting it were **Gary Taylor**, CEO of InfoCision Management Corp., and **Dr. Dale Lewison**, Taylor Institute interim director, at Interaction 2006 — Great Lakes Direct Marketing Days. "John has lived and worked at the point where direct response and the Internet meet traditional retail marketing," Lewison said.

Interaction 2006 was a marketing conference sponsored by the Taylor Institute, the first undergraduate institution of its kind in the country. A part of UA's College of Business Administration, it was funded with a $1.5 million gift from Taylor.

Costello, a resident of Atlanta, is a 1968 graduate of the University of Akron and a member of its Foundation Board of Directors and the College of Business Administration Advancement Council. He received the university's Dr. Frank L. Simonetti Distinguished Business Alumni Award in 1997 and an Alumni Honor Award in 2000. In 1997, he established The John and Lia Costello, Jr. Endowed Scholarship for Excellence in Business. Costello joined Home Depot in 2002. He was largely responsible for the slogan, "You can do it. We can help."

In 1996, Costello was named one of the 50 most influential people in marketing by Advertising Age and is an inductee to the Retail Marketing Hall of Fame.

http://www.uakron.edu

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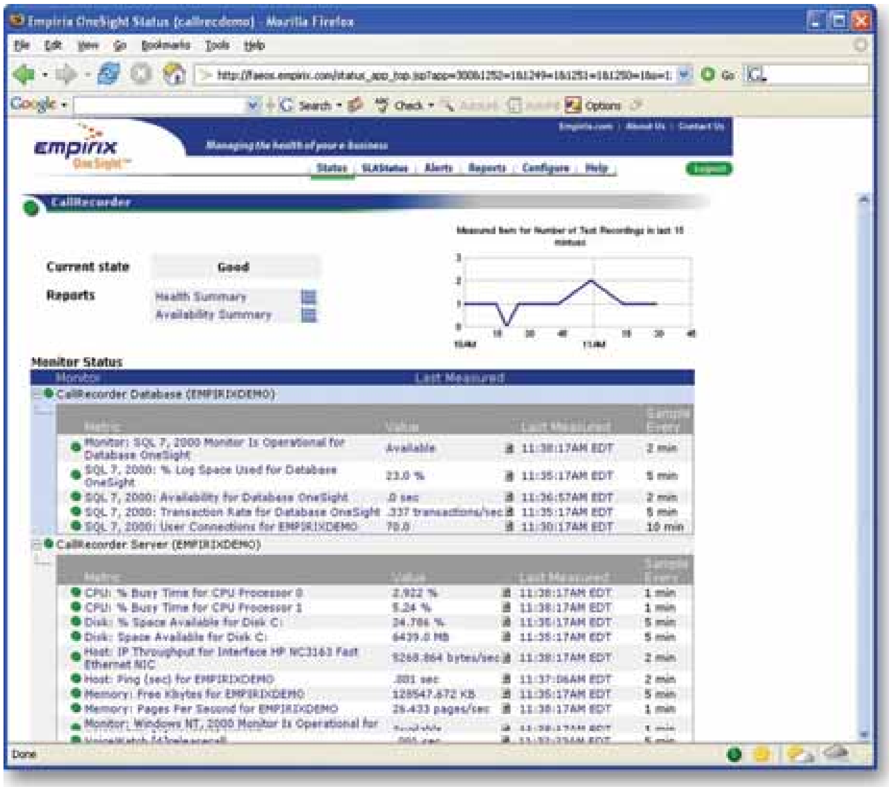
Empirix Offers OneSight For Call Recording Quality

Empirix Inc. (news - alert) recently launched what it calls the first quality assurance solution for contact center call recording systems. OneSight for Call Recorder Assurance proactively identifies failed or degraded call recording, logging and call archival while providing measurements for recorded call quality. Contact centers, particularly in the financial services market, can now enforce regulatory compliance, more efficiently resolve disputes, improve risk management and validate quality monitoring by ensuring call recording environments are functional. Empirix's OneSight solutions drive real calls into contact centers, and then measure the health and performance of both applications and infrastructure. OneSight allows organizations to correlate the end-to-end caller experience with the health of each application and component and critical links among other telephony and data infrastructure. This integrated management solution enables customers to quickly identify and isolate probable causes of common technology issues, including IVR slowdowns or outages, misrouted or dropped calls, slow screen pops, poor sound quality and failed call recording. OneSight also features a module that can correlate real-time call behavior with voice self-service performance to help contact centers measure and reduce the impact of technology issues on agents' key performance indicators (KPIs).

http://www.empirix.com


Empirix OneSight Status [callrecdemo] - Mozilla Firefox
File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help
Google
Search
Check
Options
empirix
OneSight
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Done

CallRecorder

Current state	Good
Reports	Health Summary Availability Summary

Monitor Status

CallRecorder Database (EMPIRIXDEMO)

Metric	Value	Last Measured	Sample Every
Monitor: SQL 7, 2000 Monitor Is Operational for Database OneSight	Available	11:38:17AM EDT	2 min
SQL 7, 2000: % Log Space Used for Database OneSight	23.0 %	11:35:17AM EDT	5 min
SQL 7, 2000: Availability for Database OneSight	.0 sec	11:36:57AM EDT	2 min
SQL 7, 2000: Transaction Rate for Database OneSight	.337 transactions/sec	11:35:17AM EDT	5 min
SQL 7, 2000: User Connections for EMPIRIXDEMO	70.0	11:30:17AM EDT	10 min

CallRecorder Server (EMPIRIXDEMO)

Metric	Value	Last Measured	Sample Every
CPU: % Busy Time for CPU Processor 0	2.922 %	11:38:17AM EDT	1 min
CPU: % Busy Time for CPU Processor 1	5.24 %	11:38:17AM EDT	1 min
Disk: % Space Available for Disk C:	24.786 %	11:35:17AM EDT	5 min
Disk: Space Available for Disk C:	6439.0 MB	11:35:17AM EDT	5 min
Host: IP Throughput for Interface HP NC3163 Fast Ethernet NIC	5268.864 bytes/sec	11:38:17AM EDT	2 min
Host: Ping (sec) for EMPIRIXDEMO	.001 sec	11:37:06AM EDT	2 min
Memory: Free Kbytes for EMPIRIXDEMO	128547.672 KB	11:35:17AM EDT	5 min
Memory: Pages Per Second for EMPIRIXDEMO	26.433 pages/sec	11:38:17AM EDT	1 min

Inova Solutions Announces Inova Performance Optimization Suite 5.2

Inova Solutions, Inc., (news - alert) a provider of real-time visual communication solutions, has announced the availability of Inova Performance Optimization Suite 5.2. The latest release includes new features.

Inova Performance Tracker, Inova's Web-based real-time dashboard product, now provides quick-start wizards for customers with Aspect or Avaya systems. The wizards map standard data fields into pre-defined templates for quick deployment of digital dashboards. The wizards support roll-up views of group level performance at up to five locations, with drill-down to skill level for Avaya users and agent level for Aspect users. All data are presented in real-time, with an option for intra-day updates spanning up to 24 hours.

Inova's XML support is further extended to accept as an input any standard RSS feed. Customers using Inova's advanced messaging and alerting features can now include weather, news or any other relevant content captured directly from an RSS feed. Soon to follow will be the ability to publish data from Inova software to an RSS feed, enabling customers to deliver regular updates on operations and performance through any standard RSS reader.

http://www.inovasolutions.com

Tim Ramos Joins Before The Call As President And CEO

Before the Call, (news - alert) a provider of on-demand sales intelligence solutions, announced that **Tim Ramos** has been hired as president and CEO, and will join the board. Ramos will be responsible for the overall direction and operations of the company.

Ramos is known for founding Ramos & Associates, an IT services firm that was named the Bay Area's fastest-growing privately held company by the San Francisco Business Times in 1996 after achieving a 1,218 percent rate of growth over three years. It was acquired by Cambridge Technology Partners that same year. After the acquisition, Ramos became senior VP of worldwide enterprise solutions at Cambridge and increased annual revenue from $25 million to $90 million. He was then promoted to executive VP of Cambridge North America, where he managed annual revenue of $500 million and 2,600 employees. He was also an officer of the company and a board member of Cambridge Technology Capital Fund.

http://www.beforethecall.com

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Contact Center Services At The Core Of Integrated Direct Response Process Outsourcing (DRPO):

Combining Contact Center Excellence With Integrated Direct Response Solutions Gets Results!

Whether you acquire new customers via outbound telemarketing, inbound sales and customer support, direct mail, the Internet or other direct response channels, contact center excellence is the foundation of most direct response marketing and customer contact initiatives today. For a direct response campaign to succeed, everything has to click: effective direct mail pieces and DRTV ads must drive calls to a contact center that has the sales savvy, tools, training and quality assurance processes necessary to convert inquiries to new customers, and then support the new customer base with world-class inbound customer service.

What benefits exist for a company if their carefully designed mail pieces or DRTV ads drive inbound calls to a call center that lacks the sales savvy, tools, training or quality assurance processes necessary to convert those inquiries to sales? The sharpest marketers today know that their companies must elevate their ROI by assessing contact center interactions and agent performance, applying segmentation and other analytics to that information and developing more efficient sales and customer retention strategies.

Finding a true direct response process outsourcing partner such as 1 2 1 Direct Response is critical to the success of marketing campaigns. Such a partner enables the sharpest marketers to elevate the return on marketing dollars invested by taking information gathered through contact center interactions and applying segmentation and other analytics to that information to develop more efficient sales and customer retention strategies.

1 2 1 Direct Response specializes in delivering the highest quality inbound and outbound contact center services, along with daily direct mail and fulfillment capabilities as well as response and database analytics that help clients understand what their customers want and how to get the most response out of their marketing investments.

Direct response marketers have been on the leading edge of the business process outsourcing (BPO) trend since the first mass direct mailers outsourced their printing processes. Many marketing organizations outsource discrete processes such as:

- Outbound telesales, research, renewal, cross-sell and upsell functions;
- Inbound sales and service center functions;
- Database building, management and analytics;
- Printing; and
- Letter, mail shop and literature fulfillment functions.

With increasing frequency, outsourcers are turning to organizations such as 1 2 1 Direct Response that have have leveraged all of the aforementioned complete arsenal of direct marketing processes to increase marketing return on investment. By allowing a full-service direct response services provider to deliver a suite of capabilities as a true marketing partner, the marketer benefits through increased marketing efficiencies.

A Case In Point

1 2 1 Direct Response has been providing contact center services to the cable industry for over 10 years. We help our cable clients acquire new customers, upsell and cross-sell new services to existing customers, collect delinquent payments and provide customer care support.

An industry leading cable services provider engaged 1 2 1 Direct Response to survey newly installed customers to determine satisfaction with the installation process, assist in the initial usage of the cable product and ensure that the client had received the proper user manuals and fulfillment materials. For those clients who needed additional fulfillment materials, 1 2 1 Direct Response was able to ship those packages the next day from its own mailing and fulfillment operations.

Our cable client determined that the survey and follow-up fulfillment process reduced customer churn so significantly

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& Direct Response Solutions Experts

that the results more than pay for the survey process.

Integrating Contact Center, Direct Mail And Analytical Solutions To Get Results

Contact Center Excellence

1 2 1 Direct Response has been a contact center outsource services provider for nearly 20 years. By specializing in selling via the phone, 1 2 1 helps its clients raise funds, sell goods and services, service existing customers and reduce customer attrition. Whether via outbound, inbound, or blended agent contact, clients are assisted in accomplishing the following:

- Developing award-winning training programs;
- Hiring, motivating and retaining efficient and effective phone representatives;
- Implementing smart and efficient list management and dialing strategies;
- Designing and implementing advanced quality assurance policies and procedures;
- Providing teleservices compliance leadership and guidance; and
- Enjoying client service that goes beyond excellent by providing creative ideas for continual program improvement and creativity.

Direct Mail And Fulfillment Services

Many direct response marketing clients benefit from 1 2 1's ability to deliver daily mailing and fulfillment capabilities. This involves sending out sales confirmations, donation pledge fulfillment kits, literature, or other materials that were requested by customers during their phone contact with 1 2 1.

Creative Analytical Solutions

1 2 1 Direct Response helps its clients mine their prospect and customer files for more revenue by segmenting and analyzing their data files. With close to 20 years of direct marketing experience, 1 2 1 can test and analyze results, helping clients to uncover hidden opportunities, reduce customer churn, and cross-sell and upsell new products to existing customers.

Getting Marketing Results

For companies that require excellence in direct response results, whether that excellence is limited to finding the right contact center outsourcing partner or seeing the benefit of a partner that can enhance contact center activities with creative marketing analytics and direct mail fulfillment functions, 1 2 1 Direct Response guarantees that its performance will get the optimal results.

For more information, visit http://results.121directresponse.com/, 1 2 1 Direct Response's TMCnet channel at http://www.tmcnet.com/channels/contact-center-services/ or the company's Web site at http://www.121directresponse.com.

Companies Offer Mediocre Customer Service At Their Own Peril

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

A recent survey of 2,048 adults conducted by Harris Interactive indicated that 96 percent of Americans had had a bad customer service experience in the previous year. In terms of broad, anecdotal statistics, that's pretty much everybody. But it's just minor annoyance these customers are experiencing, isn't it? Just how bad is this bad customer service?

Forty percent of respondents indicated they would rather go to the dentist than experience a bad customer service session. (If this were an audio commentary, I'd cue the sound of an old-fashioned, low-speed dentist's drill right now.) That's bad. Additionally, 80 percent of respondents said they had stopped doing business with an organization because of a poor customer service experience.

Yet many companies continue to blithely offer the kind of slap-dash customer service and BPO processes that arise from trying to do it themselves. The Home Depot model may be great for yard work or re-grouting the bathroom tile, but when a company's very existence is on the line because of bad customer service, doing it yourself doesn't cut it.

The usage rates of outsourced customer care have waxed and waned over the years. When many companies fall on leaner times, the first thing many of these organizations do is try to "save money" by bringing their call center and BPO functions in-house. This, of course, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and loss of customers is blamed on that initial business downturn, not the free-fall in the quality of customer service that results when these processes are taken out of professional hands and put into the hands of amateurs who do not count quality customer service provision and back-office efficiency as their core competencies.

During times of hardship, companies ought to be outsourcing more, and not less, to services providers. The kinds of efficiencies due to economies of scale, quality boosts and increased upsell and cross-sell skills that come from handing more processes to professionals is akin to the mysterious results that occur when you increase the amount taken out of your gross paycheck for your 401k plan and it actually boosts the amount of your take-home pay.

Otherwise, you're sending your customers out for unnecessary dental work...without novocaine. CIS

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

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Four Simple Questions To Evaluate On-Demand CRM

It's hard to ignore the intense interest that on-demand CRM has been generating lately. Like many new computing paradigms introduced over the years, on-demand CRM is being touted as a revolutionary replacement for on-premises CRM, which is dismissed as an antiquated enterprise software model.

Noticeably absent from all that attention has been a clear-eyed assessment of the on-demand model. A closer examination of the history of computing indicates that new paradigms don't always replace earlier approaches that have proven value. For example, the vast majority of corporate information in the U.S. still resides on mainframe computers, which allegedly were being replaced by minicomputers, PCs and networks. Evolution, not revolution, drives the technology adoption in a very practical sense.

A realistic way of thinking about on-demand CRM is that it is another deployment method, one that may be appropriate for some companies, given the right circumstances. A clear understanding of the benefits and limitations of both on-demand and on-premise CRM is required if your company is to make the correct choice.

What should you be thinking about as you consider whether on-demand CRM makes sense for your company? There are four key issues you should consider: building competitive advantage, managing complexity, application integration and security. Weighing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the CRM solutions available to you in these four, closely interrelated areas — regardless of their delivery option — will make your decision easier.

How Do You Define Competitive Advantage?

In today's intensively competitive markets, many products are commodities. Successful companies in many sectors often differentiate themselves by the quality of the services they provide and the depth of the relationship they establish with their customers. If your company uses services as the basis of its competitive advantage, you will probably require a CRM system that you can easily customize to support the delivery of those unique services. Your system will also need to be flexible so you can quickly adapt your customer-facing business processes to respond to shifting market requirements. Most on-demand solutions provide some customization capabilities, but on-premises systems typically offer stronger process and workflow capabilities that enable easier customization and greater flexibility.

How Complex Are Your Customer Relationships?

Some companies have a multi-unit business structure, with relatively complex customer interactions. For example, a financial services organization may have different business units selling various insurance and investment services and wants to leverage cross-sell and upsell opportunities. Other organizations need to share customer data across their sales, marketing and service functions. Your marketing department may need to provide sales with data on special promotions and campaigns.

Anytime different parts of your company need to talk with the same customer, you need a CRM system that can coordinate and synchronize these activities, otherwise you risk confusing and alienating the customer. This is where many on-premises CRM systems excel, while most on-demand solutions are designed to work within a single department or business unit.

Janice P. Anderson
Onyx Software Corp.

Is Integration Essential?

In many industries, there is no single ERP solution that companies use to manage their entire business. This is especially true in the services sector, which has a history of creating highly customized applications used every day to support mission-critical functions. These specialized applications represent a substantial investment and are not likely to be displaced any time soon. An enterprise CRM solution for customers with this type of environment must be able to easily fit into the existing IT infrastructure. For example, providing sales with the billing history of a cus-

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tomer stored in an accounting system ensures that sales personnel won't try selling a product to someone who doesn't pay their bills. Making that information available to other applications for customer management purposes requires the ability to share data across multiple systems through a variety of interfaces. While most on-demand offerings claim to have integration capabilities, close examination reveals that it typically is done using fairly rudimentary approaches. If your environment requires active bi-directional integration with multiple back-office systems, be sure you have a clear understanding of how your software supplier is going to link in your customer management system.

What About Security?

Many companies view customer data as their crown jewels. Their systems make extensive use of customer data, and both they and their customers want that information kept as secure as possible. In certain industries (such as healthcare), regulatory compliance and privacy laws demand secure and verifiable protection of information. If this sounds like you, ask yourself if you are comfortable with the notion of your vital data being kept at a remote data center, outside your control.

"Like Déjà Vu All Over Again"

On-demand is not a particularly radical new approach to software. In fact, in some respects, it closely resembles the timesharing architecture that prevailed in the 1970s. Regarding it for what it really is, a software delivery model, creates the proper framework in which to evaluate if it is a good solution for your business needs.

It's important to assess your business goals and objectives against the capabilities of the CRM solutions you're evaluating, regardless of whether they are delivered using an on-demand or on-premises approach. This will allow you to reach the right decision for your company. As Yogi Berra sagely observed, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there." **CIS**

Janice P. Anderson, the chair and chief executive officer of Onyx Software Corp. (news - alert) (http://www.onyx.com), is a seasoned business executive with 22 years executive management experience at both large and small technology companies including Onyx, Lucent Technologies and AT&T. At Onyx, she is spearheading the company's drive to extend its core enterprise CRM solutions with integrated business process management and analytics offerings.

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Why Sales Leads Fall Through The Cracks, And How SFA Can Make The Difference

Five Minutes With Paul Petersen,
Senior Director, FrontRange Solutions' CRM Business Unit

Question: Recently you highlighted the fact that 70 percent of sales leads never receive proper follow-up from the sales department. What is the reason and how can companies improve this?

Paul Petersen: That is a startling statistic, and I think a lot of executives don't even know they have this problem in their company. Leads that fall by the wayside are off the radar and it can be an invisible problem.

We see several root causes. Often, prospect names are captured by marketing, but those leads aren't automatically imported into a common database on which both sales and marketing staff rely. Also, there are often workflow bottlenecks as companies import leads into a system. The bottom line is that both the marketing and sales departments need access to a central repository of all prospects and customers — a "corporate memory" where employees can track responses to marketing campaigns and look at the history of sales efforts. As the company interacts with that prospect or customer, every history item needs to be in one spot. You can call that a CRM system or a sales force automation (SFA) system, but the key is to get marketing, sales and, if possible, other departments to work from the same contact record; after all, you communicate with individuals.

As an example, if a prospect visits your Web site and fills out a form, does that lead automatically import into your SFA system? Is the lead automatically assigned to a sales rep, and does that rep get an e-mail notification? Did you automatically capture the type of opportunity and the source? Was a response automatically sent back to the prospect? Your Web site and telesales teams offer economical ways to collect prospect details, and if you pass that info to your sales team, it turns a "lukewarm call" into a warm one with instant rapport that builds the relationship.

You can see a big part of the answer is the "A" in SFA — automation. Automation gives marketers more time to be strategic and monitor campaign effectiveness, and tweak programs on-the-fly. Automation also gives your sales staff a better way to receive opportunities and track them. Busywork is also minimized, so sales people have more time to meet with customers.

Question: Leads can also get "lost" after the fact, correct? Meaning, there are no data on the conversion ratio for a particular marketing campaign?

Paul Petersen: Right. As a marketer, you want to know that seven percent of your Google (quote - news - alert) advertising leads have been converted to sales. That's the holy grail of marketing ROI, but it is nearly impossible information for most companies to collect and analyze. Once marketing delivers a lead to sales, that trail goes dead. However, a good SFA system captures that and allows you to slice the results to learn more. That's because sales is working from the same contact record that marketing uses. When a sales person converts a "prospect" to a "customer," the results of the campaign are updated and marketing sees the big picture. That becomes a strategic advantage as you decide which marketing projects to fund.

You can also lose track of a lead when the sales team determines the prospect isn't ready right now, but will be later — a "future prospect." In most organizations, sales can't return these to marketing and they are "lost" — but with a central database, you could "tag" the contact for ongoing marketing, and that keeps your brand and value proposition in front of them till they are ready to buy. Managing leads this way is a real secret to ROI.

Question: Those are compelling reasons to adopt SFA, but sometimes these SFA

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implementation projects initially meet resistance, correct? What are your thoughts on that?

Paul Petersen: Sometimes there is resistance when the individual workers don't see the benefits of the new system. For example, management might want a new SFA system for the real-time forecasting roll-ups, but that doesn't motivate the sales staff. The sales staff might see the system as a time waster. So it's important to show the sales and marketing people how this will improve their lives and help them work more effectively. A good SFA system will reduce reporting requirements for sales people, keep them abreast of what the marketing department is doing with the prospect, and help them track follow-ups. So, if you involve the users in the design stage of an SFA rollout, get their buy-in and listen to their needs and make their job easier, then there is almost no resistance to a new system. Conversely, it's a bad idea for the IT department to pick the software and to push the deployment through unilaterally because there will be a lot of resistance and low user adoption.

Question: Why aren't more companies using SFA systems that unite marketing and sales?

Paul Petersen: If you think about the organic evolution of any sales and marketing operation, both departments had a job to do, and they started using tools to get the job done. So it's not a surprise that we see disparate systems, a lack of automation and loose coordination. But a business should outgrow that approach if it's going to reach its potential. The benefits to both marketing and sales teams are huge.

Question: What is the hottest new trend in SFA, and why?

Paul Petersen: An emerging area of SFA that is having a real impact on sales effectiveness is the concept of the customer record as an information portal. As a salesperson, I want more information at my fingertips — if it's fast and easy to see. For example, I'd like to know if the customer is on credit hold before I call. I'd like to know if a shipment went on time. I might even like to know what the weather is like in that prospect's city. Good SFA software is now providing very simple ways of introducing this real-time information into a customer contact record.

For example, in GoldMine we have taken the approach of embedding browser windows right in the contact record, and it's quite easy for the administrator to set up "views" of internal systems like credit, or views into external Web data. Now, when I start my call, I can scan these real-time data and have a much more informed conversation with my customer. And I didn't have to call the credit department or open up other applications to get this information.

Companies are starting to use these "views" in really innovative ways. For example, when a sales person opens the contact record, a map and directions to the prospect's location will appear in the window. I recently visited one company that provides that map, and they go a step further to show existing customers that are near a prospect. That really helps plan travel, and gives you some good local references to mention to your prospect.

The other hot trend is that businesses are rejecting lengthy CRM implementations that require lots of costly customization. The ideas of quick time to deploy, quick time to value and low total cost are really dominating the buying agenda now — integration without the heavy lifting, and quick usability. That's good news for us, and we see that market shift as permanent. Also, a phased approach to implementing your SFA system lets you keep focused and adapt to changes; after all, marketing and sales evolve in response to the market. CIS

When a sales person opens the contact record, a map and directions to the prospect's location will appear in the window.

Paul Petersen is the senior director, CRM Business Unit, for FrontRange Solutions. (news - alert) In his 30 years in IT management, development, sales and marketing, Petersen has built, bought and sold solutions for major companies, including McDonalds Corporation, GE, Arthur Young, Delrina and Symantec. He also holds the Professional Certified Marketer designation from the American Marketing Association. He welcomes questions at paul.petersen@frontrange.com.

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Outsourcing Risks And Rewards

The term business process outsourcing (BPO) evokes mixed reactions. Though it has been, and continues to be, a primary catalyst of globalization in today's business world, it has its share of critics who question both its validity and effectiveness. Nonetheless, outsourcing has grown exponentially over the years and is now a household term and a way of life for thousands of businesses worldwide.

The concept of BPO started relatively small, with only very basic processes and functions such as inbound customer support and basic transaction processing being outsourced. But over the past decade, the functions being outsourced have become increasingly more complex and far-reaching, requiring global strategies, a wide range of talented people and innovative technology solutions.

Today's BPO market is a multibillion-dollar industry that continues to undergo rapid transformation on a global scale. Most of the world's leading companies have already — or are currently in the process of — adopting BPO as a strategic business solution, leading to dramatically increased spending across the board on a wide range of related services. As a result, the BPO industry is extremely diverse with multiple sub-sectors, each with its own unique characteristics.

According to Gartner, by 2007 the size of the global BPO market will be $173 billion, of which more than $24 billion will be outsourced to offshore contractors. Currently, the leading verticals in the BPO market are:

- Telecommunications;
- Technology;
- Financial services;
- Healthcare; and
- Energy.

In these verticals, the most commonly outsourced processes include internal auditing, payroll, human resources, benefits management, contact centers/customer care, payment/claims processing, real estate management and supply chain management. But despite the continued growth and potential of BPO outsourcing, many experts feel that it has certain risks. With this in mind, a review of the risks and rewards of BPO is warranted.

The Risks

Loss of control. Outsourcing key processes may result in the loss of direct managerial control of the process. Many managers suppose it is harder to manage the outsourcing service provider as opposed to managing one's own employees internally. Although processes are customized to meet the specific needs of clients, discrepancies usually occur early in the business relationship between a BPO provider and the client.

By John Bugh
Intelenet Global Services North America

Mitigating the risk: The most effective way to maintain control of an outsourced process is to develop an ongoing communications plan and ensure a strong governance model. In some cases organizations have been known to place an employee onsite with the outsourcer to manage and oversee the process on a daily basis. This is particularly effective early in the relationship.

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Security threats. Although rare, an unfortunate reality is that outsourcing can threaten the security and confidentiality of a company's most sensitive data and processes. When a company outsources a highly confidential business process such as payroll, the outsource service provider will be in possession of sensitive information such as salary and social security numbers. It is a delicate process with daunting ramifications, and a company must fully evaluate each potential risk and benefit before deciding which business processes to outsource and/or retain in-house.

Mitigating the risk: Scrutinize the provider's information technology infrastructure to ensure security, document expectations as they relate to sensitive customer information and protect against any breach with strong contractual provisions. In addition, there are a number of worldwide certifications designed to help protect both physical and data security. One of the most common is BS-7799, although BS-1500 is also quickly gaining momentum as the new worldwide standard.

Hidden costs. Generally speaking, the potential hidden costs of outsourcing are not pre-calculated. These silent add-ons may include legal fees and time spent coordinating the contracts between two companies. Hidden fees conspire to reduce the allure of BPO by unexpectedly driving up costs, which is ironic, as cost savings are a major reason why companies outsource in the first place. The hidden and missed costs of outsourcing are hard to predict, which can cause overall costs to be underestimated.

Mitigating the risk: Simple due diligence can go a long way toward minimizing hidden costs in advance. Many companies are providing the master services agreement (MSA) and statement of work (SOW) upfront in the request for proposal (RFP) process to minimize time and costs.

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The Rewards

Cost control. As previously noted, outsourcing is seen by many as a major driver of globalization for many companies. At the same time, for most companies, it offers substantial cost savings. The economic benefits of outsourcing are real and significant. First, outsourcing reduces costs in three areas:

- *Implementation costs.* Client companies save time and money by leveraging the BPO provider's IT investments and professional expertise. Implementations are simplified and streamlined because configuration and customization options are typically limited to proven alternatives.
- *Operational costs.* Companies that internally manage their own processes can spend more than twice as much annually on maintenance and upgrades than those companies that outsource their functions. Such substantial cost savings are largely achieved through the ability of outsourcers to pass economies of scale and efficiencies of centralization on to their customers.
- *Reduction in technical staff.* Companies that manage their own technology typically have a dedicated technical staff — an expensive "black hole." In contrast, companies that use outsourced technology platforms are often able to reduce their technical staff by nearly 50 percent.

These cost savings are available because outsourcers have developed excellent cost structures. Providers become experts at implementation, configuration, customization and operation of a given process. They integrate content only once and can then share that expertise with potentially hundreds of clients. They also offer highly flexible "standardized" process customizations, which can then be leveraged by multiple clients and can be implemented in minutes. In contrast, "unique" customizations in companies that do not outsource can often take months.

Increased efficiency. Companies that outsource their business processes are often able to capture new efficiencies while simultaneously improving productivity. Again, they are in a better position to reallocate resources to other projects, helping their employees achieve greater efficiency and results in the process. In most cases, BPO providers bring in high-caliber subject-matter experts to design and manage the processes. These experts offer years of experience that many companies do not have access to or cannot afford on an ongoing basis. The end result is the development and adoption of well-defined business processes that allow for productivity improvement without compromising quality.

Reallocation of resources. The more back-office functions that can be offloaded, the more effective the organization. An important facet of business process outsourcing is its ability to free top executives from some of their more mundane day-to-day process management responsibilities. On average, executives spend 80 percent of their time in the management of details and only 20 percent on formulating strategy. But when a business process is outsourced, this ratio can be easily reversed.

At the same time, outsourcing enables employees to assume greater responsibility within an organization. In particular, it often lets managers at all levels spend time saved on activities such as:

- Strategic planning;
- Measurements and analytics;
- Planning and budgeting;
- Work with line-managers to understand business needs; and
- Developing and evaluating new technologies and processes for even greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Incremental Value

Business process outsourcing is particularly beneficial in that it directly influences shareholder value. BPO is all about optimizing business performance to create and maximize value where it did not previously exist. There has been a tremendous upsurge in BPO and related outsourcing industries in developing countries like India because of their ability to reduce costs while increasing quality of service. This has helped outsourcing companies and BPO service providers alike create enormous ROI for their shareholders and investors.

An important facet of business process outsourcing is its ability to free top executives from some of their more mundane day-to-day process management responsibilities.

The above points give us an idea of the advantages associated with BPO. In addition, it helps expand global business relations while increasing foreign exchange for countries involved in the process. But there have been certain points that highlight the disadvantages associated with BPO as well.

Outsourcing is a trend that will continue to grow as global barriers to business fall. Increasingly complex solutions, integration initiatives, budget and staff constraints and the demand for diverse talent are among the many factors that will fuel the trend. Companies should consider outsourcing as part of the regular planning and budgeting process. When used under the right conditions, outsourcing can have near-term value to organizations and the clients they serve. CIS

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Cultivating Customer Satisfaction Strategies For The Hispanic Market

It seems that when companies think about targeting the Hispanic market, they focus their energy on how they can capture their share of the market's $1 trillion spending power. Their gut reaction is to find ways to generate Hispanic market demand for their products and services. Consequently, companies often call on me to ask, "What is the best way to reach Hispanics?" Or, "How does a company create a culturally relevant ad campaign?" These are great questions, but for most companies, especially those which have just decided to target this marketplace, they are also very premature questions.

Why? Because at this stage, a company has no idea who their target market is, whether their product is a fit with the market, what consumption patterns might be, how large the opportunity might be or whether they currently have the infrastructure to service, satisfy and retain this consumer. So when companies come to me ready to advertise, my advice is for them to take a few steps back and do the groundwork that will help create a strategic foundation that will define their course of action; how they will need to align to market requirements, what that alignment will cost, how they will measure success and how long it will take to see a return on investment.

I argue that setting out to target a new marketplace needs to be as methodical as it might be for any other initiative a company might be considering — it requires a strategic business planning process. The process I propose considers and applies business planning frameworks that aid an understanding of the external environment in which companies will compete for this marketplace and their organization's ability, readiness and willingness to deliver. If done methodically, Hispanic strategies that result will complement and optimize corporate efficiency, effectiveness and productivity and enable profitable and sustainable Hispanic market growth.

Companies setting out to capture this marketplace must first focus on the process of external and internal assessment. With a focus on the external environment, companies need to be able to answer questions such as:

• Are there regulatory, immigration, foreign trade or other activities that may impact the Hispanic market and must be considered in our planning? This analysis includes intelligence gathering of political, social, cultural, regulatory, legal, international trade and demographic forces that have the potential to impact industry/competitive reaction and activity as well as how it will likely impact consumption and provider choice.

• What are our competitors doing to market to Hispanics? How are their actions likely to impact what we do? You'll want to explore your industry's competitive landscape. Are there competitors in the Hispanic market that are not part of our standard set? This includes researching how the industry has evolved, where it is has been and where it is going. How does our company fit in today and how will it fit in the future, and what will be the impact on our business? What must we do to be competitive now and in the future?

By Terry J. Soto
About Marketing Solutions, Inc.

• How do Hispanics consume our category and how are they currently meeting their needs in the marketplace? How has our consumer base changed in our trading areas as a result of the Hispanic market presence and growth, and what has been the impact on our business? Given these impacts, what is the likely scenario five years from now for our company if we take action or do not take action? There are many different groups within the U.S. Hispanic market and they are not all your potential customers. You'll want to identify your Hispanic target — primary and, in some cases, secondary. You'll want to understand demographic, socio-economic, psychographic and cultural differences and how they compare to your current target market.

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The answer to these questions will help you define the potential impacts on your current market strategy, your operations and your organizational structure and help you formulate questions to assess your internal readiness to deliver.

During the internal assessment, attention is turned inwardly to the company itself. It is meant to determine readiness to go after this marketplace. An internal assessment process will help your company determine if there is a fit between your company, its offering and Hispanic consumers' needs, preferences and behavior. Such an assessment will also help define your company's ability to deliver relevant value to this consumer. During this process, you must identify aspects of your operations that can be leveraged, identify any gaps and define how to organize to optimize your position. The internal assessment focuses on considering three key business model pillars:

- Strategy: Your value proposition or your offer to your primary consumer, and your profit model;
- Operations: How you need to go to market, including your supply chain, customer service, distribution, technology, human resources, research and development, manufacturing and sales and marketing; and
- Organizational structure: How your infrastructure is set up — hierarchical or flat — by product and service lines, or by functions or customer segments.

My experience has shown that most successful initiatives are those in which a Hispanic strategy aligns with a company's existing operating model, company direction and strategic priorities. The internal assessment process focuses on identifying ways to deliver relevant value to Hispanics without compromising a company's business model. Following the external and internal assessment process, you are then ready to start the strategic planning process to develop a strategy and implementation plan; essentially your Hispanic go-to-market strategy. This work takes what you learned from the two assessments and brings your critical issues and barriers to implementation and success to light. You then use these insights to build a unique and sustainable Hispanic market strategy complete with operational plans and metrics that will maximize success potential and create greater value for key stakeholders.

In my work, I see dozens of companies that have entered the marketplace prematurely and are struggling to prove their success to management. By many accounts, companies are rushing into creating Hispanic advertising and promotions. They begin efforts by creating demand before they have organized their companies to service this consumer. They do it without understanding what they are up against competitively. Consequently, companies are baffled by failed attempts to gain, satisfy and retain Hispanic customers. Upon closer examination, the common denominator among most companies facing these disappointments is a lack of upfront cross-functional planning and implementation geared at servicing Hispanics.

It happens something like this: A company advertises an offer and Hispanics respond by calling the store or a customer service number to obtain information. The customer's first surprise: no Spanish-language customer service, automated or otherwise, to provide the answers Spanish speakers are looking for. If there is a Spanish language automated system, the Spanish-language prompt comes in too late and there are few, if any, bilingual representatives to provide the live support most callers will request.

How do I know this happens? We've experienced it first-hand through hundreds of on-site and telephone mystery shopping experiences for major retailers, banks and insurance companies. The customer ends up frustrated, doesn't obtain the information being sought and decides not to purchase at all, or decides to purchase from the competition. Customers end up canceling their service, returning merchandise and seeking satisfaction in ways that are extremely frustrating to them and very costly to the companies who are targeting them prematurely.

In effect, this consumer is acting no differently than any other, but unlike his English-language counterpart, has no access to the purchase decision-making or customer service information he or she can understand.

Some companies explain that they outsource call center services to India where Spanish cannot be provided. These companies should consider outsourcing Spanish-language calls to call centers in Mexico or other Latin American countries. Yes, it does require additional consideration and steps, but it's clearly necessary if a company is going to use advertising to generate demand.

From the examples above, it's easy to see how advertising and sales promotion campaigns can be quickly neutralized by lack of operational follow-through and alignment. Even worse, some companies have actually concluded that either the advertising was flawed or that Hispanics are unresponsive, uninterested or cannot afford the products and services being offered.

The final impact is felt in the metrics when measurement methods are flawed and don't consider operational hindrances that have put a damper on sales results, customer satisfaction, repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth.

The other challenges that must be considered by customer service departments and call centers are the differences in how Hispanic calls need to be handled versus mainstream calls. For instance, the time that is required to handle a call from a Spanish speaker, depending on the industry, can be approximately 50 percent due to greater information needs among Hispanics who are less familiar with a product or service or who are unfamiliar with the process of interacting with a particular type of company. This clearly points to some critical issues that a company must address if they are to be successful with this consumer. It also points to some internal adaptation that must occur in order to integrate this level of service into the operations. Clearly, hiring, training and even cross-training needs must be addressed. In certain industries, compensation structures and performance assessment metrics differ for bilingual call centers.

By many accounts, companies are rushing into creating Hispanic advertising and promotions. They begin efforts by creating demand before they have organized their companies to service this consumer.

Additionally, call volume timing among this consumer differs; later and earlier hours and more weekend versus weekday hours are more relevant, so scheduling is impacted. Less familiarity and comfort with automated systems requires simplified cues and greater staffing of Spanish speakers because more Hispanics will want to speak to a live agent. Servicing this consumer also implies different and more extensive scripts that often address issues and topics that are less common in the mainstream market.

For instance, retailers indicate that Hispanics are more likely than non-Hispanics to buy extended warranty coverage for items, but because these programs are seldom explained in Spanish, either verbally or in print, there is tremendous confusion and dissatisfaction with the action required on the part of the consumer when an item needs repair. This situation is then exacerbated if there is a lack of Spanish speakers at the warranty call center or the store to explain the complex terms of the warranty.

Rebates are another area that lack operational follow-through in terms of customer support. Hispanics will often call customer service centers to complain that they have not received their rebate checks, only to discover that the rebate mandated mailing the UPC code along with the rebate form. Some retailers are finding that the knowledge about rebates that is taken for granted among non-Hispanic consumers cannot be assumed among Hispanics. Similar complaints are heard about Hispanic consumers' lack of familiarity with insurance and banking products, electronics and even packaged goods.

A company's ability to implement a successful Hispanic market strategy starts with an understanding of how Hispanic customer service needs differ from its current customer base, an understanding of how the company needs to adapt to the market's needs and requirements, an understanding of what it needs to do to maintain an edge over its competition, and an understanding of its internal operations and the places where change needs to occur. These considerations and alterations are critical to achieving a successful Hispanic customer service strategy. Without them, a company will be hard-pressed to deliver customer satisfaction as part of its value proposition to its Hispanic target. And this is something no amount of advertising can address. CIS

Terry J. Soto, president and CEO of About Marketing Solutions, Inc., (news - alert) is a well-respected voice in Hispanic market entry strategy consulting. Terry works with Fortune 500 companies to improve their chances of Hispanic market success and is the author of numerous articles on Hispanic strategy. Terry lectures on Hispanic Market Strategy at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management. To obtain a copy of her book, Marketing to Hispanics: A Strategic Approach To Assessing And Planning Your Initiatives, visit http://www.aboutmarketingsolutions.com or call 818-842-9688.

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Case Study From The Financial Services Sector: VekStar

"In the old days, you could pick up the phone, make a couple of calls and find a potential customer willing to talk to someone about a lower rate. Today, it is like finding a needle in a haystack in the dark!"

Brent Seaman, COO for VekStar, (news - alert) a $13 million outsourced contact center provider dedicated to the financial services sector, uses the above phrase to explain the current climate in financial services.

In the last six months, the financial services industry has seen some changes. Interest rates are rising, the refinancing boom is coming to an end, and the days are over that saw mortgage companies simply opening their doors and taking orders. Many mortgage professionals have been forced to move outside their comfort zone and try new approaches to win and retain business. As a 260-seat contact center operation based in Indianapolis, VekStar has experienced increased demand from the mortgage and banking sectors to produce high volumes of quality leads at the lowest possible cost.

VekStar works on behalf of several hundred different financial services companies at any one time, undertaking multiple campaigns and generating thousands of qualified new business prospects every week. The company's existing IT solution was struggling to cope, and management knew they needed a more sophisticated system that would enable them to reach more prospects and turn them into hot leads. At the time, the company was spending too much time supervising and managing teams, and they were faced with the added burden of do-not-call (DNC) compliance. In addition, because of the depth of detail required to produce highly qualified leads, VekStar also needed improved scripting capabilities to answer a large number of questions, some of them very routine. They needed a solution that would maximize the potential opportunity from every call.

The company was not merely focused on the short-term, it was looking for a technology supplier that could offer a solution to help them develop and grow business into the future. Because of increased competition within the financial services market, VekStar knew it needed to adopt new strategies for differentiation, focusing on greater personalization and more emphasis on customer retention. This goal required the ability to manage many different campaigns with different messages.

VekStar's wish-list included:

- Comprehensive scripting for lead qualification;
- The ability to handle multiple campaigns simultaneously;
- The ability to meet compliance regulations;
- A system that would support growth;
- Improved reporting;
- Cost savings through enhanced management;
- First-call resolution; and
- Fast implementation.

Selecting The Right Partner

The first solution the company chose didn't work out; they had made the decision to purchase primarily based on price, but later found the solution to be counter-productive. It took over 30 days to install and, once operational, it was unable to adhere to the fast pace of the call center. It required too much support from IT staff, and it provided unreliable reporting. Not only was the system slow and unable to handle multiple campaigns, but VekStar was skeptical of the system's ability to comply to the mandatory three percent cap on call abandon rates.

VekStar investigated alternatives and switched to Amcat's Contact Center Suite solution. VekStar reported that the transition was seamless, and the core campaigns were operational within five days.

Efficient Recycling

The first major difference VekStar witnessed was the increase in efficiency. Since changing technology, the company has experienced approximately 30 percent more productivity in its campaigns. This was due to a number of combined factors. First, the company was able to make better use of data

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using a "recycling" facility that automatically fed records back into the system if initial contact was unsuccessful. Now, not only can a number be recalled if no one is home, but VekStar has the ability to group data using other parameters, depending on the customer's circumstances. For example, a customer might say, "I am not interested at present, but may be refinancing in a couple of months," or "Call me back on Saturday once I've spoken with my husband." The record would then be automatically scheduled for a callback at the appropriate period, or alternatively at set intervals such as 30, 60 or 90 days. The recycling rules allow VekStar to reach more people, cut down on wasted data and, in turn, achieve maximum return on list resources, which ultimately benefits their clients.

First-time Resolution

VekStar wanted the technology to maximize their "talk-time," but they were also looking to improve the way calls were handled and to provide better service to customers. Processing loan or mortgage applications can be a complicated process; companies need to be able to screen candidates thoroughly. The agent's desktop application became a central focus. VekStar needed a solution that would allow them to easily personalize the questions depending on the campaign.

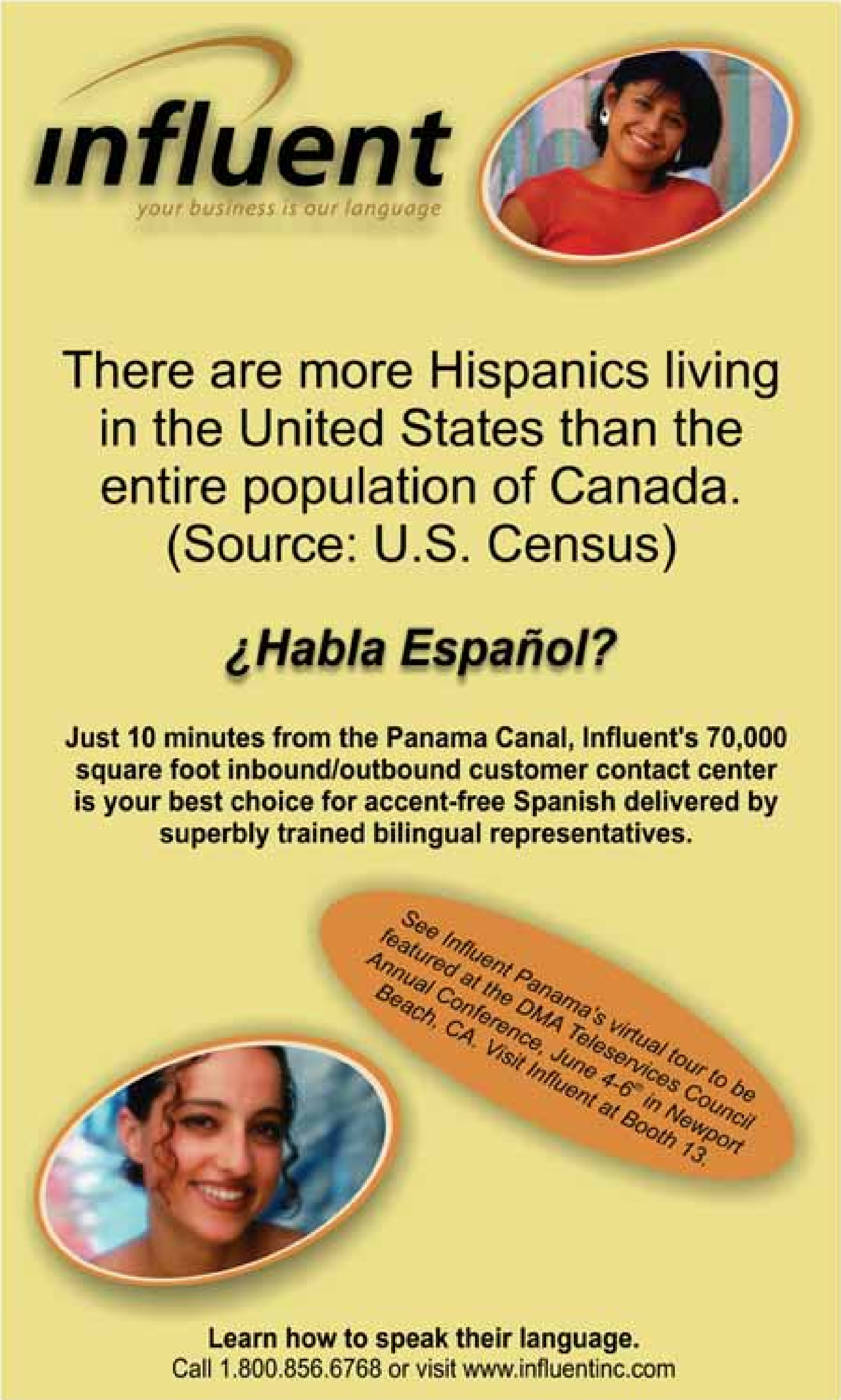
More important, they needed to be able to transfer the caller and the caller's corresponding data to another extension, department or even a qualified advisor at another location if necessary. Indeed, many mortgage companies are now looking for "live, hot transfers," which means they can transfer the lead with all the corresponding data directly to the loan officer. Without this option, there is the danger of having to call the customer back, which in many cases can result in a lost sale or lead.

Over the last six months, the onus within the financial services industry has clearly centered on customer satisfaction and retention. Achieving first-call resolution represents the first key step, because it is all about ensuring that the customer is matched to the right offer at the right time. The design of the agent desktop application helps staff members to easily access all the information they need to complete a well-qualified application in a single call.

Staying In Control And In Compliance

In the past it had been difficult for VekStar to track and monitor the productivity of campaigns; they now have access to built-in, user-friendly management tools. For example, the company's management consoles now provide a view of all campaigns and allow both management team members and the company's clients to view real-time statistics on group or agent performance. They can see whether campaigns need any adjustments and make those changes on-the-fly. It also helps them judge which agents are performing best and which agents require more training.

VekStar determined early in the process that their customer communication system must be easy to manage and maintain for success. With their new system, they are able to set the campaign parameters, including the call abandonment rate, as dictated by compliance regulations. This is important because the alternative is to have supervisors watching the system to be sure the company remains in compliance. Meeting the latest do-not-call compliance rules is a serious issue for any financial services organization. Amcat's solution offered VekStar peace of mind that compliance was being attained and monitored automatically.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Indeed, many mortgage companies are now looking for "live, hot transfers," which means they can transfer the lead with all the corresponding data directly to the loan officer.

Promoting Inbound

In the new, more regulated environment, it's even more vital to make every contact count. That is what VekStar remains focused on in its technology and customer contact processes. Not only are they improving the experience of every call, but they are also investing in additional brand-building activities such as direct mail and advertising with their own printing and mail house. When they do speak to a prospect, it's more likely that prospect will have heard about the company and will therefore be more receptive to offers. At present, the company is sending approximately 15,000 direct mail pieces per month. Later this year, the company plans to use the Amcat system to handle the inbound calls generated from those direct marketing activities. VekStar has stated that in the future, it anticipates inbound traffic to rise to approximately 30 percent of all calls.

Because the new system provides VekStar with greater flexibility, the company can increase agent capacity faster and easier. Once additional staff are hired and trained, they can be operational within a few hours. VekStar has plans to open a third location in Florida soon, and plans to add as many as 5,000 seats to its total operation over the next 36 months. Amcat has also shown its commitment to being a long-term partner and not just a technology company. This factor, reports VekStar, is perhaps the most important facet of the relationship the two companies have developed. **CIS**

For more information about Amcat, (news - alert) visit http://www.amcat.com.

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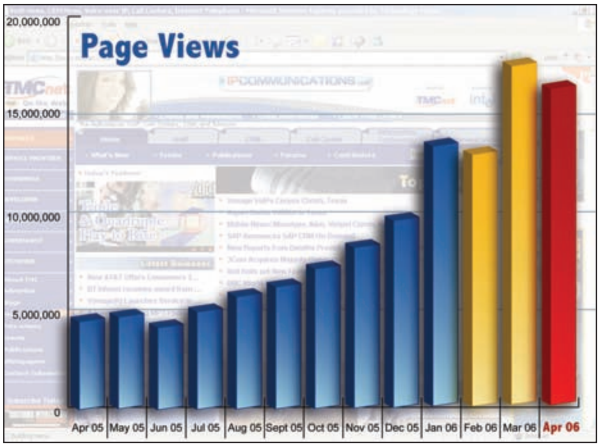

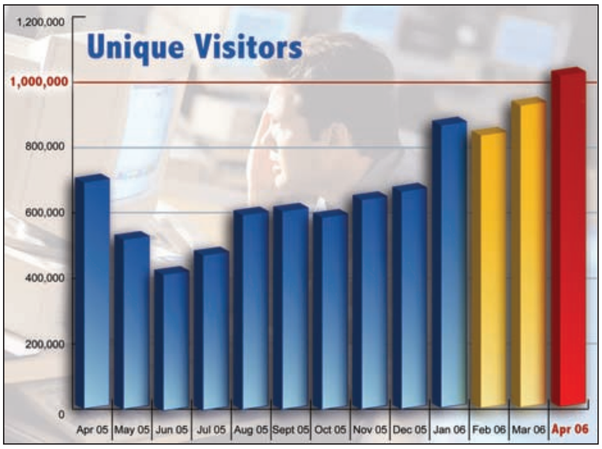

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How Much Is Your Customer's Trust Worth?

Identity theft, while once thought to be a minor issue, could dry up multichannel contact center sales. Companies must determine their data privacy and protection strategy to gain and retain customers' trust. Without their customers' trust, companies are bound to lose just about everything.

Natalie L. Petouhoff and Brian Johnson
Hitachi Consulting

Who knew the crime of the century would be attacking the very same data companies have been working for years to collect, organize and use? Data thieves, that's who. In fact, the theft of the very information that is the lifeline of contact centers and CRM operations is now more profitable than illegal drug trafficking, according to U.S. Treasury Adviser Valerie McNiven.

Could Identity Theft Dry Up E-commerce?

As a leader in your company's contact center and CRM practices, you'll know that cyber crime has come front and center. While companies are strategizing how best to utilize customer data, thieves are learning new ways to steal it. Consumers are learning that the danger they are in is growing exponentially.

What is the impact of data theft to your company, your customers, their trust and subsequently your bottom line? It's insurmountable, unless the need for data privacy and protection moves from the server room and the legal beagles to a corporate-wide customer strategy in which every employee is responsible for protecting customer data. Gartner's recent study about online security shows customer confidence is rapidly eroding. If customers' confidence continues to erode, how many of them will be willing to buy on the Web, disclose personal information or offer credit card information to contact center agents when placing orders on the phone?

The Role Of The Media In Alerting Consumers

Why is identity theft a hot topic right now? Part of the reason is that criminals have gotten much better at data theft. Another key component is the increasing awareness on the part of consumers. Several years ago, when the Ponemon Institute interviewed consumers, most did not fear identity theft. They did not know how prevalent it was or the effects it could have on their lives should they fall victim. As such, they did not pay much attention to it or demand changes from companies.

However, this is all about to change. Identity theft stories appear almost daily on every major cable news program and newspaper. It's even discussed in publications such as Parade Magazine and Popular Mechanics. Via this saturation coverage, the media is obliterating the naïveté of consumers, driving the heightened outrage of customers and the need for change.

In researching further, we found that part of the reason customers have not put more pressure on companies to do something is that they were under the impression that credit card theft, for example, would not affect them very much. The facts, however, are astounding. Consider the following:

- According to the FTC study, nearly 10 million consumers were victimized by some form of identity theft in 2004 alone. That equals 19,178 people per day, 799 per hour and 13.3 per minute. Consumers have reportedly lost over $5 million, and businesses have lost an estimated $50 billion or more.
- Between 2001 and 2002, identity theft was about 11 to 20 percent, but increased by 80 percent in 2003, according to a Harris Interactive Study.
- Gartner reported that phishing scams have affected 2.4 million Americans, costing consumers, banks and merchants $929 million.
- The Secret Service and the FBI recently busted Shadowcrew.com, an online shopping bazaar for identity theft criminal organizations where thieves from all over the world bought and sold credit card numbers and identity documents.
- And while many credit card consumers thought that zero liability meant zero damage when their cards are stolen, all are surprised when they learn the truth. When a card is stolen, it can take years of paperwork and lost time

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DATA
SECURE

and result in embarrassment, limited access to loans and the ability to buy property or qualify for a new job.

The Data Decision: To Protect Or Not Protect

With the most recent report of identity theft in which the VA's office reportedly lost the social security, name and address information of 26.5 million veterans and as much as 80 percent of active military service members via a stolen laptop, we are again reminded of how vulnerable we are. The list of companies reporting data theft, including ChoicePoint, Bank of America, T-Mobile, DSW Shoes, LexisNexis and the University of California Berkeley, just keeps growing. Why? Because most companies, when building their databases, did not foresee the danger of data theft or this new type of crime. With each evolutionary step we take to improve business comes a parallel challenge. In this case, the challenge is protection.

The Emotional Impact Of Customer Data Theft

One of the most surprising findings of the California Public Interest Research Group and Privacy Rights Clearinghouse study, "Nowhere to Turn: Victims Speak Out on Identity Theft," has to do with customer trust. While the financial impact of I.D. theft is certainly great, the worst is the emotional impact the situation creates. Stress, emotional trauma and damaged credit reputation were among the most difficult aspects to deal with. Victims reported feeling violated, helpless and angry. Consider if that is how most of your customers feel when they have trusted you with their data.

As the media stories gain momentum, from the hijacking of Paris Hilton's Sidekick to the theft of retired General John Shalikashvili's (former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) identity, which allowed scammers to open 273 new credit cards and run up $2 million in fraudulent charges, consumers are becoming outraged by the repercussions affecting ordinary people's lives. Consumers have reason to be angry. According to Besty Broder, FTC Identity Theft Expert, "Even when you give your information to legitimate merchants, it's only as safe as that institution's safeguards."

The Effect Of Eroding Trust

Consumer's trust of online banking, Web site and contact center sales could dry up in a instant. The financial impact could extend even further. Research by CoreBrand assessing the impact of a negative incident on brand equity and shareholder value suggests that upwards of 10 percent of shareholder value can be tied to brand.

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What's A Company To Do?

Customer data are critical to the positioning and success of a company, shaping how it innovates products, goes to market, builds customer relationships via the contact center, gains market share and increases revenue and profits.

On the flip side, imagine how your customers, who value their personal information and privacy, would feel if they realized their data were being sold to the highest bidder and that your company does not have a foolproof data privacy and protection plan. Imagine the negative "word of mouth" that could instantly spread in a blog about your company.

If customers are the sole source of value creation, then maintaining their trust is imperative for a company's success. This means identity theft must move from compliance towards the bottom-line. Companies must begin to take their brand, their customers and their data security seriously.

Who Is Responsible For Data Privacy And Protection?

If you surveyed your employees, how many would say they felt they are personally responsible for protecting customer data? With all of the bottom-line factors mentioned in this article, what can companies do to incorporate data privacy and protection into their business strategies? First, understand the strategic importance of privacy as a tool to improving customers' satisfaction, trust in the company and propensity to continue to do business with that company, (i.e., customer lifetime value).

Second is to create a team that is responsible for protecting the company's number one asset: customers. The role of a company's privacy officer is to connect privacy and brand. This begins by implementing the golden rule: think about how you would want to be treated if you were the customer. The success of a data privacy and protection initiative requires not only the support of privacy managers but also HR, CRM and the marketing and legal departments.

Respecting privacy while using personal data to benefit the customer can be a difficult balancing act. New marketing campaigns consider customers' privacy needs and provide an appropriate level of choice and personalization. Companies will want to look at the role of marketing not only in collecting and protecting customer data, but also in communicating to customers how well their data are being protected.

Marketers often fear customers will opt-out if given the choice. The study by Ponemon Institute showed that 89 percent of consumers surveyed said if they trusted a merchant, they would share their personal interests to increase the quality of products and services. Customers lose trust and stop sharing only when they don't feel a company is protecting their data and their best interests. In fact, protecting privacy can be a tool for creating more value for the customer, faster. As companies look towards the stewardship of customer data, customers will bring their loyalty.

The Bottom Line On Customer Data Privacy And Protection

Privacy and protection are competitive differentiators. For a company committed to its customers, the data protection interests of the customer and the company must be synchronized. If customers are a company's true source of value creation, then maintaining their trust is imperative. When companies understand this, privacy protection will become an important business tool, rather than just a regulatory requirement.

For more information, go to http://www.tmcnet.com/310.1 to download the white paper *Protecting Customer Data: How Much Is Your Customer's Trust Worth? The Business Case for Data Privacy.*

> **The study by Ponemon Institute showed that 89 percent of consumers surveyed said if they trusted a merchant, they would share their personal interests to increase the quality of products and services.**

Dr. Natalie L. Petouhoff (a.k.a. Dr. Nat) is a thought leader with Hitachi Consulting (news - alert) (http://www.hitachi.com). She writes white papers, articles and books based on her many years of practical experience in contact centers and CRM. Dr. Nat, as part of the Customer and Channel 20/20 Solutions Group at Hitachi, helps companies gain a clear vision of their customers today and takes them beyond the year 2020 to continue to understand their changing needs and the bottom-line value of acquiring and retaining customers in a very competitive marketplace.

As a managing vice president for Hitachi Consulting, Brian Johnson is responsible for profitable growth and intellectual property development in the areas of sales and channel marketing, customer care optimization and automation. Brian has spent his entire 20 year professional career assisting companies with improving and automating their customer-facing functions. He has extensive experience in helping clients develop CRM strategies, architect technical CRM solutions, plan for complex global implementations and manage the process and organizational change required to successfully transform themselves into customer-centric organizations.

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The IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Awards

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Customer Inter@ction Solutions realizes that technology is the key to the success of any call center, as we have been editorially covering call center technology for 25 years. We also realize that with new products and new categories of products in the call center space, it can be difficult for our readers to keep up with the latest and greatest products and services. This is why we launched the IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Awards so we can highlight for readers the best of the best in this emergent technology that is saving call centers all over the world a great deal of time, effort and capital. We've chosen as winners the products with the most admirable feature sets and the best track records of dramatically improving the operations of today's call centers.

Each company that submitted for this award was required to complete a questionnaire detailing its target market, its product's unique or distinctive features, its competitors and, of course, a list of customer references of organizations that have deployed the solution.

Following is the full list of IP Contact Center Technology Pioneer Award winners. To all of the recipients, congratulations.

— Tracey Schelmetic

Aspect Software
http://www.aspect.com
Asterix Business Edition IP-PBX

With the Asterisk Business Edition, Aspect Software (news - alert) offers a professional-grade open-source IP-PBX for customers of Aspect's Unified and Signature product lines. This packaged offering includes the Asterisk Business Edition license, SIP phones (optional), application servers and IP gateways (optional), interoperability with Aspect contact center products, installation and deployment of the solution and post-deployment support. Based on the Asterisk open-source PBX, the product offers companies the same call handling capabilities expected of closed PBX systems at a substantially reduced cost, including features such as switched or packet data and voice mail. Asterisk

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Business Edition IP-PBX provides tested reliability of critical functions and features, and also includes support and full documentation.

Cisco Systems
http://www.cisco.com
Cisco Unified Contact Center

Cisco (quote - news - alert)Unified Contact Center is an IP-based solution designed to support virtual call centers across many locations. It is ideal for large enterprises as well as small and mid-sized organizations that need to ensure scalability as their businesses grow. The Cisco Unified Contact Center can be hosted in a service provider environment as well as on premise, so businesses can choose the deployment model that best matches their organizational, technical and operations capabilities.

Cisco Unified Contact Center delivers intelligent contact routing, call treatment, network-to-desktop computer-telephony integration (CTI) and multichannel contact management over an IP infrastructure. The solution combines multichannel ACD functionality with IP telephony in a unified solution, enabling companies to rapidly deploy a distributed contact center infrastructure. Cisco Unified Contact Center enables companies to smoothly integrate inbound and outbound voice applications with Internet applications including real-time chat, Web collaboration and e-mail.

Citrix Online
http://www.citrixonline.com
Citrix GoToAssist

(news - alert) Purpose-built for remote support, GoToAssist is a comprehensive remote assistance solution designed to revolutionize how contact centers and outsourcers and consulting and IT professionals are instantly helping their customers, anytime and anywhere, while increasing profitability. Now in its seventh generation and delivering more than 10 million remote sessions annually to more than 4,000 corporate customers, GoToAssist is a managed service that offers ease-of-use, quality of service, availability, security and capability. With its advanced suite of new features, including a management center dashboard, expanded integration services, best practices resource center and enhanced collaboration and productivity tools, GoToAssist 7.0 can help transform remote services/ support into competitive advantage.

CosmoCom
http://www.cosmocom.com
CosmoCall Universe

CosmoCall Universe (news - alert) meets the contact center business needs of a wide variety of organizations. Network service providers, IT and teleservices outsourcers and other service organizations use the platform to offer hosted contact center on-demand services to their clients, in both dedicated hosting scenarios and especially in shared-platform scenarios. Outsourcers also use it to fulfill both inbound and outbound service agreements with their clients. Enterprises use CosmoCall Universe as their premise-based contact center system, sometimes providing an internal hosted contact center service to the many contact center clients within their enterprises. OEMs use its technology in their own complete contact center and customer relationship management solutions. System Integrators, VARs and business process outsourcers offer CosmoCall Universe as a component of their clients' CRM and business process solutions.

EagleIP, LLC
http://www.eagleacd.com
EagleACD

EagleACD (news - alert) has earned a reputation of being customer-centric and visionary. The basic idea is to move computing/ networking toward a utility pay-for-use model in which users can tap into vast pools of computing/networking power and use only what they need, only paying for the bandwidth processing/network connectivity and applications that are actually used. Based on customer needs, key parameters and product voids in the marketplace, Eagle developed what it calls the industry's first truly innovative "pay-as-you-go" pricing scheme.

This is a practical and cost-effective solution within the IP hosted contact center industry. Moving from a fixed-cost, asset-based payment plan to a variable non-asset based payment for minutes used is a marketing innovation. Clients pay for only the minutes they use. There is not a lot of extra billing for different items, no fixed monthly expenses per agent seat and no minimum.

Five9
http://www.five9.com
Five9 Virtual Call Center Inbound

Five9 (news - alert)Virtual Call Center Inbound enables organizations to better manage inbound calls by quickly ensuring that all incoming calls are automatically routed to the correct individuals or departments through simple and easy-to-set-up IVR phone trees and "skills groups," and prioritizes calls based on customer type, call type or other customer-specified criteria. To help organizations provide the best service possible and allow the agent to resolve the call as efficiently as possible, Five9's on-demand solution identifies inbound callers based on their phone numbers, and "screen pops" or displays the caller's name and other information to the agent or operator when they take the call. Additionally, call center supervisors can use the call recording feature for proof of a transaction or quality control, and ensure that agents have the right scripts or "worksheets" to best answer customer questions and/or steer the customer into an upsell opportunity. Five9's on-demand, hosted service allows for easy set-up and administration of at-home agent workforces as well as singular or distributed multisite centers to act as one, regardless of geographic location.

FrontRange Solutions
http://www.frontrange.com
GoldMine IP Voice Suite

GoldMine (news - alert) IP Voice Suite was the first customer interaction solution to combine IP telephony and CRM from a single vendor. By bringing

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VoIP into a critical application such as contact management, FrontRange is enabling the SMB and distributed enterprise the opportunity to adopt enterprise-level technology without having to sacrifice enterprise-level resources. Multiple vendor solutions often break when one vendor changes its product, and fixing that integration takes time. FrontRange's IP Voice system provides deep integration with GoldMine, and the integration always works because of the "single vendor" advantage.

The greatest benefit of combining CRM and advanced phone system functionality is that implementations of VoIP telephony technologies, integrated with CRM, are making a traditionally complex and expensive process now easier and more affordable, which greatly accelerates the return on investment.

GN Netcom

http://www.gnnetcom.com

GN 9350

(news - alert)The GN 9350 is a versatile, multi-use wireless headset that fits a variety of hands-free needs in the office and contact center industry. The GN 9350 is ideal for contact center supervisors who monitor agent calls on their PCs via a USB headset but are still using traditional telephony for their own telephone calls. With the GN 9350, these managers can use one headset for both tasks and roam from their desks while on calls. The GN 9350 offers DSP-enhanced sound quality and 6.8 kHz wideband audio that supports the full IP bandwidth. The GN 9350 also supports wireless conference calling. Up to four GN 9350 users are able to synch into the same call with their individual headsets by simply placing each headset into the base station of where the original connection was established. The conference call, typically consisting of people confined in a room crowded around a speakerphone, is now transformed into a discrete, clear conversation, giving its participants the convenience to roam within a 300-foot range.

Mitel

http://www.mitel.com

The Mitel Customer Interaction Solution

Because of its modular design, the Mitel (news - alert) Customer Interaction Solution can grow with a contact center as call volumes and the need for increasing levels of sophistication increase. The suite is based on Microsoft .NET architecture and uses Microsoft tools such as Exchange, Outlook and Office to provide multimedia contact center management applications that are both familiar and easy to use. Voice interactions can be seamlessly integrated to fax, e-mail and chat and routed to agents based on skill sets and the company's business rules. Mitel's Walk-in Distribution uses traditional ACD routing algorithms to route in-person walk-in clients to the first and most appropriate counter agent available across multiple disciplines. In combination with the routing of walk-in clients, the application also supplies the historical reporting and real-time monitoring of the counter agents who service your customers. Walk-in traffic becomes just another form of media that can be processed in conjunction with voice, e-mail, Web chat and fax.

Nortel

http://www.nortel.com

Nortel Contact Center 6.0

Because Nortel (news - alert) IP Contact Center solutions are infrastructure-neutral, they do not require a proprietary data network and they function independently of network infrastructure — IP, TDM or mixed. As a result, companies have maximum flexibility in how they implement an IP contact center solution, with many choosing a transition to retain more of their investment. New sites usually implement pure IP for utmost agility and the lower cost of maintenance. Agents, supervisors, managers and administrators can work anywhere they have secure Internet access, not just in locations on the company WAN, using soft phones and browser-based tools.

Highlights include the following: SIP contact center and Expert Anywhere, which help companies be instantaneously responsive and drive first contact resolution; a streamlined CSR desktop with consistent new tools for simplifying multimedia contact handling and boosting productivity; fully integrated outbound management, supporting proactive service; next-generation CTI capabilities to integrate applications rapidly in an easy-to-use development environment; and a reporting wizard that lets managers use the same browser-based tool to create custom reports. Nortel has also introduced Contact Recording and Quality Monitoring, which is fully integrated into IP Contact Center.

Plantronics

http://www.plantronics.com

Plantronics DA55

(news - alert) The DA55 adapter was designed to deliver digital audio excellence to contact centers and other organizations that use VoIP soft phones as their primary communications tool and remote employees using soft phones. The DA55 adapter offers a Call Clarity feature, which enhances intelligibility by equalizing incoming call volume; SoundGuard Plus, which shields listeners from excessively loud transmissions; and echo cancellation to ensure natural conversation even with VoIP latency. Paired with any Plantronics professional headset, the adapter infuses digital-signal clarity into every VoIP soft phone communication.

Redwood Technologies Ltd.

http://www.redwoodtech.com

RedMatrix

RedMatrix (news - alert)is Redwood's versatile conferencing application for IP and telephony networks. The product combines flexible configuration options with real-time management, co-ordination and reporting tools, providing a complete solution for managed and self-managed conferencing services. RedMatrix supports multiple simultaneous conferences in a controlled and scalable environment. Meetings can be set

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up instantly, or pre-arranged via the built-in scheduling tools. With optional "listen only" and recording features, conferences can be managed and controlled easily and effectively. Fully compatible with next-generation networks, RedMatrix provides support for circuit-switched, wireless network calls and VoIP calls, allowing conferees to call in, or be called, wherever they happen to be.

Symon Communications Inc.
http://www.symon.com
Symon Digital Appliance (SDA)

Symon (news - alert) has strategically extended its IP wallboard technology solutions to the Symon Digital Appliance (SDA) for use in any call center and enterprise with a requirement for simple digital information display or to blend real-time statistical data for simultaneous viewing with other types of information such as streaming video, employee news and company updates, and emergency communication on eye-appealing flat panel displays. The SDA is available in four models that address specific viewing needs. All models can operate concurrently on the same Symon Enterprise Server (SES) software that powers all Symon products. This alleviates the need for numerous other control devices for storing and scheduling content for broadcast. Since it is an IP appliance, a centralized SES can control any number of SDAs on the LAN or WAN; a wireless option is also available.

Telephony@Work
http://www.telephonyatwork.com
CallCenterAnywhere

(news - alert) CallCenterAnywhere is a multimedia ACD that delivers skills-based routing, blended outbound dialing, and built-in quality assurance capabilities in a single, pre-integrated solution. CallCenterAnywhere includes an integrated SIP soft switch that is differentiated by transparent and universal interoperability between VoIP protocols (H.323 and SIP) that are generally mutually exclusive on other vendor platforms.

CallCenterAnywhere offers a seamless IP migration plan in that it can act as an overlay solution across geographically diverse locations. The application logic and supporting environmental software (Web servers, mail servers, application servers, etc.) can reside in a remote data center (with optional mirroring in real-time in another) and provide control for IP voice gateways at an unlimited number of locations by securely leveraging the public Internet. IP gateways can also act as stand-alone switching resources or sit in front of or sit behind legacy PBXs at remote sites. These gateways can be strictly site-specific or represent entry points and exit points in a unified global network; one managed by a common single or multi-tenant back-end application infrastructure. Local tenant processes can live on-site or in the network.

Toshiba America Information Systems Inc.
http://www.telecom.toshiba.com
Strata ACD IP Call Center Solution

Toshiba's Strata ACD is an IP call center solution designed for small to medium-sized enterprises or larger corporate users with multiple sites. Compatible with Toshiba's Strata CIX IP family of business communication solutions, which range from a few to hundreds of ports and larger, with multiple systems networked together, the Strata ACD provides an IP call center solution that can be customized to meet the needs of each enterprise.

Toshiba's Strata ACD works with Toshiba's Netphones over Toshiba's Strata CIX IP business communication solution. It can also be converged to add digital telephones. No matter what telephone device is used, Toshiba's Strata ACD functions the same, facilitating ease-of-use for agents and maximizing customer service. All Strata CIX systems (100, 200 and 670) can be networked to expand the call center. Additionally, Toshiba's IP desk telephones and SoftIPT soft phones can allow remote agents over IP. The Strata ACD and reporting applications reside on the Strata MAS (Media Application Server), with auto-attendant, voice mail and many other applications, making it a cost-effective add-on since it shares the hardware platform.

Transera
http://www.transerainc.com
Seratel

Transera (news - alert) empowers organizations of any size to rapidly deploy a feature-rich call center for agents located anywhere in the world, including in-house, outsourced, remote, branch offices or at home. Transera co-sells and resells its software through established global IP communications carriers, targeting end users such as enterprises and outsourcers. Transera enables these carriers to upsell and cross-sell additional on-demand services sold on a subscription basis to allow customers to more cost-effectively deploy global call centers. Call center services are easily provisioned and delivered to any site and any agent regardless of geographical location or underlying technology infrastructure. Customers need only a phone and a PC with an Internet connection. Carriers no longer have to host dedicated call center systems in their network to deliver hosted call center services, and there is no requirement to install dedicated equipment for individual customers. As a result, businesses can realize the cost advantages of a bundled end-to-end solution that combines on-demand call center services with transport.

UCN, Inc.
http://www.ucn.net
inContact

inContact (news - alert) is advanced contact handling software embedded in UCN's national IP network. While many of the company's competitors require the customer site to migrate to onsite IP phone technology, UCN's customers have the option of using their existing TDM phone equipment, or UCN can interface to IP technology if the client has already made the com-

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mitment. The product offers a balanced blend of inbound and outbound contact handling features. Included in its basic cost is access to a rapid application development tool that enables IT departments to create customer contact handling flows quickly, or enables less technical business people to modify existing contact flows themselves. inContact offers a set of robust real-time and historical reporting tools, plus real-time monitoring and recording capabilities from a Web-based interface. UCN provides customizable management dashboards for arranging reporting windows to meet individual needs. The pricing model is simple and easy to understand, based primarily on user logins or configured stations and total required voice ports to support on-hold and in-process calls.

Utopy

http://www.utopy.com

SpeechMiner

(news - alert) SpeechMiner transforms recorded telephone conversations into mission-critical information, reports and alerts for decision makers. SpeechMiner includes four major components: SpeechMiner Platform, which processes the audio information and creates an intelligent database with tags, metadata and event information; SpeechMiner SMART, which allows users who are not speech experts or engineers to translate, define and create categories derived from their business needs; SpeechMiner Dashboard, a Web-based application that enables users to interact and review reports, statistics and alerts personalized for their needs, as well as "zoom-in" on information and specific events that occur inside the recorded calls; and SpeechMiner Category Library, which consists of business categories that are automatically detected by SpeechMiner for specific business objectives. SpeechMiner's Deliberate Listening technology is scientifically rooted in the Bayesian statistics, Statistical Machine Learning, Discriminative Speech Recognition, Neural Networks and Natural Language Processing fields. Applying Deliberate Listening technology to person-to-person conversations within context has resulted in exceptional real-time processing efficiencies and unmatched speech analytics accuracy and functionality

Verizon Business

http://www.verizonbusiness.com

Verizon Web Center And Verizon Voice-over IP

(quote - news - alert) IP Web Center, a hosted contact center solution, allows companies to quickly start up or expand their customer communications operations in response to rapidly changing business plans or business continuity requirements. Verizon Web Center and Verizon Voice-over IP now share the same network infrastructure and customer premises equipment, so Verizon Business can activate a range of IP telephony services, including IP Web Center, Hosted IP Centrex, IP Integrated Access, IP Flexible T-1 and IP Trunking, at a given company location.

IP Web Center is ideally suited for mid-sized businesses that want to expand the functionality of their existing contact centers or for those that want to build new contact centers based on state-of-the-art customer communications technology. Since IP Web Center is a hosted solution that simply requires a phone and a broadband connection, large companies can also use the service for agents to make and receive calls virtually anywhere in the U.S.

Voxbone

http://www.voxbone.com

Worldwide SIP Trunk

Voxbone's (news - alert) Worldwide SIP Trunk is a service that allows a call center to get local phone numbers (DID numbers) from 40 countries, and to share the capacity for all these numbers using one common trunk. With Voxbone's product, there is no need to provision one T1 in each country, no need to know anything about TDM, and no per-minute fees. Using Voxbone's Web portal, customers can completely manage the capacity allocated to each of their local numbers. Upgrade of the capacity allocated to a specific number can be done in real-time, at any time.

As an example, a call center based in India might need a local number from New York, London, Sydney and Auckland, New Zealand, and wish for all incoming calls to be forwarded via SIP to the office in India. The call center wants each of the local numbers to support 20 concurrent calls. By using Voxbone's Worldwide SIP Trunk service, the call center can simply order a trunk supporting 20 or 30 concurrent calls, and then share the capacity amongst all the countries that it needs.

WebEx Communications Inc.

http://www.webex.com

WebEx Remote Support

As an Internet-based, on-demand application, WebEx (news - alert) Remote Support sessions can be initiated by the agent or by the customer from the Internet. With a click of a button, customer requests will be queued, routed and distributed to the most qualified available agent. Agents can initiate desktop share, file sharing and address customer concerns in a fast and efficient manner. Customer permission is required to perform any of the functions, providing secure, permission-based access. WebEx Remote Support is delivered on-demand over the WebEx MediaTone Network, a private global network. No new software or hardware is required, making it easy to implement and easy to scale as support needs change. The MediaTone Network offers better than 99.99 percent reliability, as well as robust security. Customer information is never persistently stored on WebEx servers and 128-bit SSL and AES encryption ensures all support calls are private and secure.

Witness Systems

http://www.witness.com

Impact 360 IP Recorder

Witness Systems' (news - alert) Impact 360 — which supports traditional, IP and mixed telephony environments — is one of the most widely

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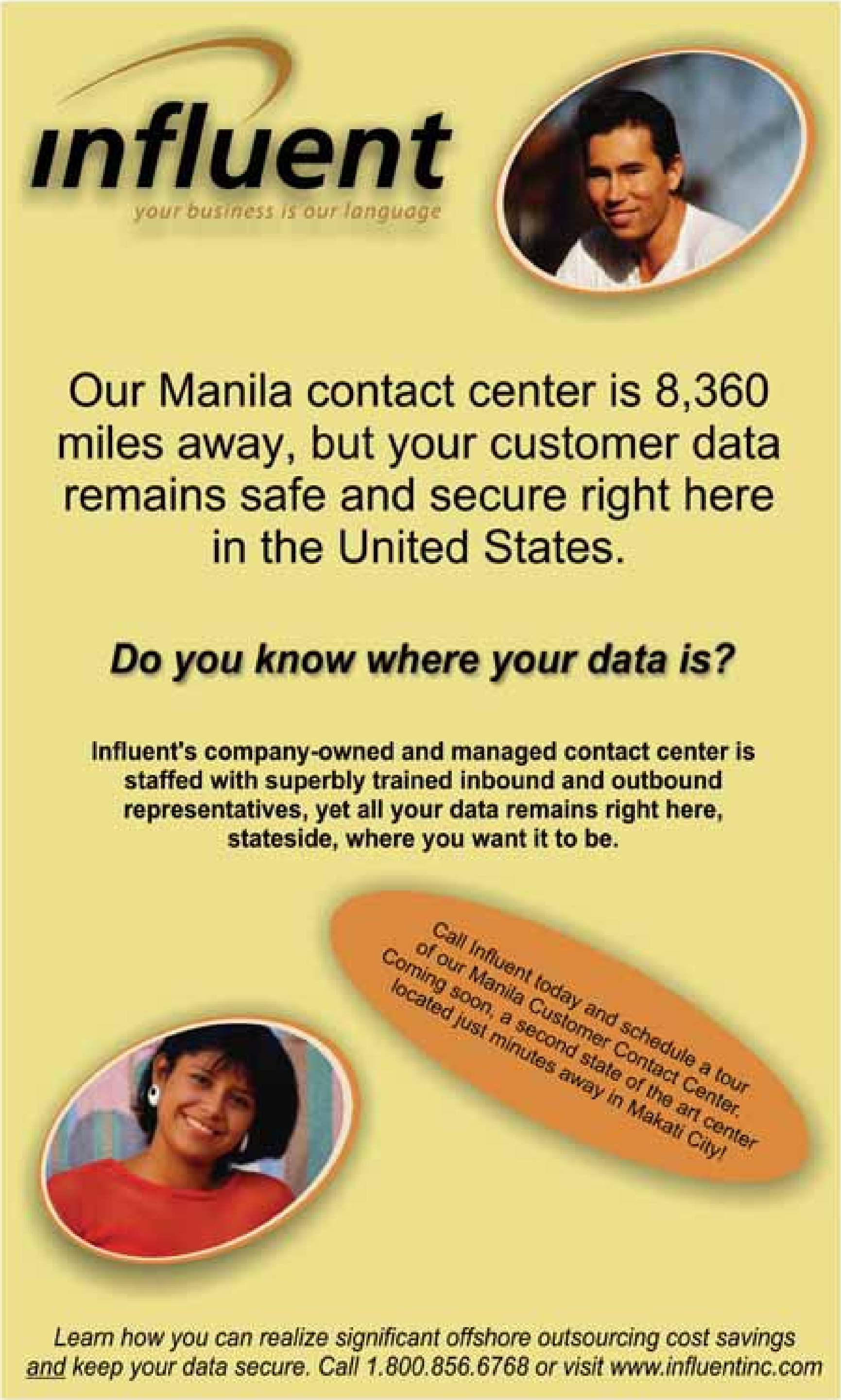
deployed IP call recording solutions on the market today. The Impact 360 IP Recorder enables up to and including 100 percent call/customer interaction recording, easily handling high-volume recording for compliance and sales verification purposes as well as for quality assurance. The software records all voice transactions across multiple sites. It can randomly capture a subset of transactions that may be of particular interest to an individual, or record contacts on-demand. Leveraging Impact 360, companies can acquire more value from telephone contacts by immediately recording, categorizing, notifying and storing their IP telephony calls.

The Impact 360 IP Recorder solution brings the benefits of contact recording, review and analysis to potentially everyone who uses a telephone at their place of work, and enables employees to better collaborate by capturing and sharing recorded contacts enterprisewide. The software-based recorder, which operates on an open architecture, is cost-effective and can scale down to single-channel occasional recording to meet the needs of individuals and small to mid-sized businesses, as well as scale up to meet the requirements of large enterprises.

Zeacom, Inc.
http://www.zeacom.com
Zeacom ContactCenter

Zeacom (news - alert)ContactCenter is targeted at organizations operating contact centers with fewer than 300 seats. Zeacom's success in this target market can be attributed to its ability to deliver sophisticated contact center functionality at a price point that is accessible to small and medium-sized organizations. Zeacom has long recognized the importance of Web-based applications and has developed its Zeacom ContactCenter solution with IP-based communications in mind. Zeacom ContactCenter works with multiple IP telephony environments as well as non-IP environments, making it easier for organizations to migrate their contact center operations over to an IP environment. Zeacom's latest release, Zeacom ContactCenter 4.0, encompasses a number of distinctive new features and enhancements. For example, Zeacom's Fax Queuing now makes it easier to reply quickly and accurately to faxes using customized fax response templates. Activity Queuing makes it possible for contact centers to queue, process and manage new media types such as work tickets, reference numbers or outstanding tasks. **CIS**



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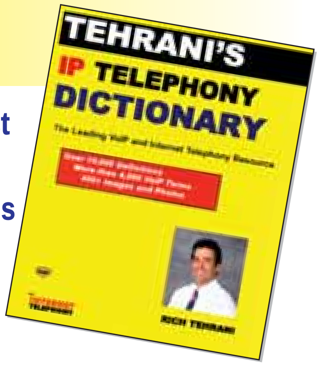

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By Tracey E. Schelmetic
Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

Buy One Headache, Get Three Free

It's not a secret that I like to complain about bad telecom customer service (see my May column in which I discuss my bêtes noirs of customer service, all of which happen to be telecom companies). But I call good customer service when I see it, and I'm increasingly seeing it in the business sectors in which companies have a great deal of competition. Though it doesn't take an analyst to see why this is the case (the impetus to please your customers when they have a lot of competitive options is far greater than when your customers are stuck with you against their will because of regulation or geography), the regulated sectors may not be without competition forever, so they'd best begin taking cues from the more customer-friendly companies.

I'm always amazed when companies offer perks to their customers without contemplating whether it's something customers would actually want. I filled in a long e-mail survey for a health and beauty company recently, and the reward, which I received in the mail weeks later, was a coupon for 25 cents off any two of the company's rather pricey bath products. Wow...a whole twelve and a half cents per item for my time. Gee, thanks.

Also, I often despair at that old supermarket favorite: buy four, get one free. What makes them think I need five of whatever it is you're offering: pints of olive oil, bottles of shampoo or half gallons of orange juice? In the first place, many shoppers have limited storage for that much product. In the second place, if I drank that much orange juice before all the gallons went bad, I'd have an acid reaction so severe that when I perspired during workouts, the drops of sweat would hit the floor and eat through, like the face-hugger creatures in "Alien." I suppose I could freeze them, but then I would have to remove the large paint roller that currently occupies one shelf of my freezer (don't ask), plus the bottles of various flavors of Absolut vodka that seem to grow in there after I host parties. (I suppose between all the vodka and the orange juice, I could set up a screwdriver stand in front of the house on hot summer days to compete with the kids' lemonade stands. Something tells me I'd get the lion's share of grown-up business. Sorry, Timmy.)

On the flip side, some companies actually seem to be able to craft perks customers would like (perhaps they hold focus groups and actually listen to the results?) I was shopping in Borders books recently. I'm an avid book buyer: books take up a large chunk of my leisure income. At the checkout counter, I was offered an opportunity to become a member of their "Borders Rewards" club. I usually refuse such offers, but I listened to this one: of every purchase I make from now until November, I receive five percent of that sale into a holiday savings account, which I can apply to Christmas shopping in November/December. Not only that, if I spend $50 or more on one purchase in Borders in any given month, I receive a coupon for 10 percent off my next shopping visit. When I signed up, I got to choose a free sign-up gift: I chose the $5 they offered to put in my holiday savings account.

I opened a savings account with a Web-based financial services firm recently. They offer a no-fee savings account, and I got a promotion in the mail stating the company would deposit $25 into my new account, if I opened one…no minimum deposit. Needless to say, I now have a savings account with that bank.

I'm also equally pleased with my American Airlines Citibank credit card. American Airlines/Citicards has a program for which card holders can sign up to receive periodic customer surveys, both short and long, for various products and services. If I take the time to complete the survey, I earn what they call "E-Rewards" points. These points can be "cashed in" for a variety of things, but I primarily use them to earn air miles into my AAdvantage account. Over the past few years, I have probably earned half a domestic round-trip ticket through this "E-Rewards" program.

That's nothing to sneeze at. (It's summertime. I have plenty of other things to sneeze at.)

Additionally, the AAdvantage/Citibank partnership includes a restaurant program: I've been registered for the program for several years. The result is that when I use my card at one of the many restaurants in my area that participate in the program, I earn air miles. In some cases, for every dollar I spend in a participating restaurant, I earn 10 air miles. For a typical romantic dinner for two ($250 in my neck of the woods), I can earn 2,500 miles. That is one-tenth of a free domestic ticket.

It's no coincidence that the companies that offer the best and most worthwhile perks to customers also seem to offer the best customer service. It's a reinforcement of the message to customers, "We value you. We're happy you're our customer."

I'll drink a large bucket of screwdrivers to that. CIS

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

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