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- The CEO Spotlight On Nuasis' Ed Lauing
- In The Boardroom With Interior Concepts
- Are North American Call Centers Falling Behind?

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

Effective Hiring And Keeping "The Right People"

44 Characteristics Of "The Right People"

Successful managers are those who surround themselves with **"the right people,"** give them direction and then get out of the way.

The vitally important question to ask is, "Just how do you define **"THE RIGHT PEOPLE"**?"

In Table 1, I have tried to spell out some of the characteristics of "the right people."

Please read this editorial only if you believe that your staff is your **GREATEST ASSET!**

Most companies wrongly spend 98 percent of their time talking (yes, talking) about customer service, customer care and customer retention, and practically never talk about employee service, employee care or employee retention!

This misguided philosophy leads to excessive employee turnover and, eventually, will result in "customer turnover," which means substantially higher costs for training new staff, not to mention loss of revenue! Once a company learns that without a competent staff armed with a **flexible, positive, can-do attitude,** there will be:

- No customer service;
- No customer care;
- No customer retention; and
- No progress,

the company is prepared to focus 100 percent on that elusive, highly complex (if not impossible) task of hiring "the right people" and keeping them.

Observance Of Transparency Rule Is Vital At TMC

The right people follow the Cardinal Rule of Transparency 100 percent of the time. They NEVER, NEVER, NEVER keep management in the dark by withholding information, good or bad.

The Scope

The scope of this editorial is the effective hiring of "the right people" in general.

However, in this issue, Mr. Ted Nardine, Senior Director of Performance Management of ClientLogic, a leading Top 50 teleservices company, has written an excellent article titled Hiring And Training For The Call Center: Developing The "Universal Agent" And Beyond (see page 46).

In this article, Mr. Nardine focuses on effective hiring for the call center. Here are a few excerpts from his article:

"Transforming a call center from a cost-cutting afterthought to a viable, brand-carrying profit-generating division of the business begins by establishing effective hiring processes and training programs.

If staffed and managed properly, the contact center can be an invaluable asset to the business."

Table 1

The 44 Characteristics Of “The Right People”

I describe “the right people” as those who genuinely subscribe to the following guidelines:

1. Have a flexible, positive, can-do attitude;
2. Genuinely try not to make mistakes;
3. Don't make excuses for mistakes;
4. Don't miss deadlines;
5. Do a great job every time;
6. Remember every detail;
7. Take pride in what they do;
8. Don't say, “It's not my job”;
9. Say “Let me do it for you”;
10. Offer unsurpassed customer service;
11. Are part of the solution, not the problem;
12. Are great team workers;
13. Are on the job every day on time!
14. Set a great example;
15. Avoid being politicians and don't play political games;
16. Are not high-maintenance people;
17. Know that winners do what losers don't want to do!;
18. Follow the vitally important Rule of Transparency;
19. Never keep management in the dark about any issue, good or bad!;
20. Have a GREAT work ethic;
21. Believe that “the harder I work, the luckier I get”;
22. Are not clock watchers;
23. Come to work early, do a good job and leave late;
24. While at work, they spend 95 percent of their time working exclusively on company-related projects;
25. Know that if they have a problem with company policy to discuss it with management!;
26. Don't badmouth their employer in their blogs or Web sites! That's like biting the hand that's feeding them!;
27. Go out of their way to be extremely helpful to customers, other employees and team members;
28. Know that if they don't like something, they should develop a BETTER solution to the problem, then inform management and persuade them that doing it the employee's way is a better way! They know that complaints do not achieve anything except lowering morale! In which case, management is justified to terminate such people after adequate warnings;
29. Are model employees, and are encouraged to come up with new cost-saving and/or profit-generating ideas;
30. Avoid chronic complaining;
31. Avoid being “bad apples”;
32. Are honest and never lie;
33. Never abuse expense accounts. The right people know that such abuse is equivalent to stealing;
34. Never get involved in sexual harassment;
35. Have a great sense of humor;
36. Are never pretenders. If they don't know the correct answer to the question, they say, “I don't know,” they don't make up answers;
37. Don't create problems;
38. Try to prevent problems;
39. Spend company money like it was their own; i.e., don't waste it;
40. Don't cover up mistakes and lie. Studies show that 20 percent of employees lie to management to cover up mistakes;
41. Don't abuse company e-mail for frequent personal use;
42. Are sure to under-promise and over-deliver;
43. Treat customers with the highest levels of integrity, dignity, truthfulness and professionalism;
44. Last but not least, they uphold company values to the fullest extent.

The Breakfast With Legendary Jack Welch

Not long ago, Rich Tehrani, President of TMC, and I had the rare privilege of having breakfast with the Hall of Fame CEO of [General Electric](#), ([quote - news - alert](#)) Jack Welch. We asked Jack, "How do you rank your sales managers?" He stated, "There are four kinds of sales managers and here is what to do with them:

1. First, a manager meets his sales goals, but doesn't uphold company values...I say fire this manager.
2. Second, a manager does not meet sales objectives, but upholds company values. I say give him another chance.
3. Third, a manager meets sales goals and upholds company values. I say promote and reward him.
4. A manager does not meet sales objectives and does not uphold company values. I say get rid of him."

How Do You Avoid Those Worthless People With Bad Attitudes?

Today's job seekers are sophisticated. Many resumes are inflated, and many candidates are well schooled in giving the right answers to your questions!

However, to discourage "the wrong people," i.e., people with bad attitudes, otherwise known as WIs (worthless individuals), I have prepared a list of statements and items designed to scare off WIs. We use this as a qualification test for ALL new candidates before the

Today's job seekers are sophisticated. Many resumes are inflated, and many candidates are well schooled in giving the right answers to your questions!

Table 2

Don't Take A Job At Technology Marketing Corporation If:

You have ever stated any of the following...or any of the following actually bothers you or describes your mindset or behavior!

- You do not have any of the 44 characteristics listed on Table 1.
- You are a high-maintenance person.
- You have ever kept management in the dark about anything whatsoever.
- You are a political animal. Corporate politics defined: politics is a game played by incompetents!
- If your ego is out of control! (We don't run this company based on ego!)
- If you are a clock-watcher.
- If you are a chronic complainer.
- If you are always negative (a full glass always seems empty to you).
- If you can't take criticism.

Or...if you have ever stated:

- "It is not my job."
- "I wasn't hired to do this."
- "It is not my fault."
- "It is always someone else's fault."
- "I don't know (even though it's my job to know)."
- "I called him, there was no answer, therefore, the project died. I have never heard of being resourceful!"
- "I am doing someone else's job and I shouldn't be."
- LAST, BUT NOT LEAST: Don't take a job at TMC if you are NOT prepared to work on 12 cylinders ALL THE TIME! Don't take a job at TMC if you are not a performer! There is NO room for con artists here!

interview process.
Above All, Look For Multifaceted People!

Successful companies are those that hire smart, flexible, multifaceted people. As your company grows, your requirements will change. Flexible, multifaceted people

who possess a positive, can-do attitude will be able to adapt to the changes. On the other hand, negative, inflexible people will lead your company to extinction! That is why they are justifiably called WIs.

The Road To Success

The following statements represent a few of the most precious comments I have read about successful companies and people. They reinforce practically everything I have tried to explain in this editorial:

- "The success of every organization depends on how well the entire team works together!"
- "Treat people like you want to be treated, that's the key to success!"
- "Your success is the direct result of your attention to detail!"
- "Learn from the mistakes of others — you can never live long enough to make them all yourself!"
- "Success comes from listening. I've never learned anything by talking." Lou

Congratulations To The Top 50 Teleservices Agencies

As the industry's leading publication since 1982, it is my distinct honor to congratulate all the companies in the 21st Annual Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking (outbound). By becoming a Top 50 Teleservices Agency, you have distinguished your company as one of the very best in the outsourced teleservices, customer care/CRM industry. Be sure to inform your customers and prospects of this great news, for awards without marketing and differentiation are wasted! Please read my Publisher's Outlook titled "Award Marketing" at <http://www.tmcnet.com/cis/0203/0203po.htm>.

Customer Inter@ction Solutions and TMC are pleased to announce that this year's Top 50 Teleservices Agencies/MVP Quality Awards Dinner will be held in conjunction with the 25th Anniversary Celebration for *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine in New York City on Thursday, May 4th, 2006.

We have selected the elegant Marriott East Side Hotel on Lexington Avenue as the venue for this special party. Many past winners of Top 50 and MVP Quality Awards — true industry luminaries — have been invited to join us in honoring you on this great evening.

The event promises to be the most exciting teleservices-focused event of the year.

For more information, contact Frank Coppola at fcoppola@tmcnet.com or 203-852-6800, ext. 131.



our past...we cannot change the fact that people act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you...we are in charge of our ATTITUDES.

Something For Nothing

People with poor attitudes are likely to stand in front of the fireplace and say, "Give me heat...then I'll add wood!" Obviously, such people will never get anywhere! Successful people don't look to get something for nothing, and they don't make money...THEY EARN IT!

Keeping "The Right People"

If you are blessed enough to have a great, hard-working team with a flexible, positive, can-do attitude, then your number-one priority should be to cherish them, treat them like gold and give them plenty of challenge, great pay and promote them within the organization. Above all, let them know their hard work, achievements and dedication are greatly and genuinely appreciated. Let's not forget that they are indeed your greatest asset. If they are treated as such, then they will treat your customers as if they are their greatest assets! After all, loyalty, respect, appreciation and the resulting success are two-way streets.

As always, I welcome your valued comments. Please share them with 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.

Holtz, head football coach at Notre Dame — 1988 College National Championship Winner.

Calvin Coolidge's Advice On Persistence, Determination And Hard Work

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence, determination and hard work make the difference." — *President Calvin Coolidge*

Management Lessons Learned From Jimmy Johnson

Jimmy Johnson is one of the most successful coaches in football. "Everyone I deal with is put on a scale," Johnson said. "The better performer, the harder he works, the more he meets the guidelines, the higher he is on the scale.

"If they fall short in some of those areas, the lower they are on the scale. And they have very little margin for error near the bottom. I like guys that

work hard and play good."

But everyone in the organization has to think about team goals. Anyone who distracts from those team goals is out of line. And everyone has to understand that.

About Attitude

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than education, money, circumstances, failures, success and what other people think, say or do. It's more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we embrace that day. We cannot change

Announcing Our Newly Redesigned Web Site:

I urge you to visit TMCnet.com, which is the **world's No. 1 communications and technology Web site**.* No other Web site covers quality information on CRM, contact centers, teleservices, and VoIP like TMCnet.com. This claim has been verified by WebTrends and by being No. 1 in 50 relevant search terms on Google. Last, but not least, TMCnet.com has been ranked in the top one percent among all Web sites worldwide based on traffic.* Indeed, we are very proud and humbled!

**Sources: Alexa.com ranking and WebTrends*

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

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By Ron Wegmann, Vertical Solutions
What is customer relationship management software,



exactly? The answer to that question is different depending on whom you ask. For many companies, CRM equals sales force automation (SFA). Others use the term CRM to describe customer support management, field service, contact center, or marketing automation.

OUTSOURCING

40 CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions Magazine's Twenty-First Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agency Ranking

This is the twenty-first year Customer Inter@ction Solutions magazine brings you its "Top 50" Teleservices Agency Ranking. In this issue, we're presenting the "Top 50" outbound portion of the ranking. (The inbound portion of the ranking will be highlighted in the April 2006 issue.) Since its inception in 1986, our "Top 50" ranking has been used as the benchmark for choosing large-capacity/sized teleservices agencies.

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION

46 Hiring and Training For The Call Center: Developing The "Universal Agent" And Beyond

By Ted Nardin, ClientLogic

If you asked most CEOs what the most important aspect of a call center is, you will likely get a quick response: "low cost." In today's competitive landscape, however, smart executives are beginning to reevaluate their call centers and turn them into well-oiled, revenue-generating machines. A call center that adds business value in addition to retaining a low-cost profile gives a business a tremendous advantage over its competitors.

INNOVATIVE IDEAS FROM THE CUSTOMER CONTACT EXPERTS:

A SPECIAL EDITORIAL SERIES SPONSORED BY WEST CORPORATION

50 Providing The Ultimate Customer Care: The Solution Recipe For Success — Multi-Blending

All companies like to offer their customers personalized service, particularly when it comes to answering inbound calls. Every customer interaction — from the first call to the last call



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— deserves the highest quality customer care to maintain complete satisfaction. Despite a relentless commitment to high-quality customer care, many companies still provide customer service in the old-fashioned single-solution way: in-house contact centers.

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By Vijay Mehrotra, Enkata

The best way to address silently dissatisfied customers is to understand why customers call in the first place. By identifying the root causes of customer contacts, you can pinpoint the operational improvements that are needed to eliminate service issues that lead to dissatisfaction and churn.

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By Kurt Mey, Dimension Data North America

Results from Dimension Data's recent Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report indicate that North American contact centers are lagging in several critical areas, including call response times, disaster recovery preparedness and security. This means that North American call centers — and the businesses that depend on them — may be at a greater risk for business disruption and customer defection. Why are North American call centers falling behind?

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TMCNET.COM ONLINE EXCLUSIVES



CallMiner Gives Comcast Call Analyzing Power

By David Sims, TMCnet CRM Alert Columnist

CallMiner's VSR makes possible medium and large speech analytics installations, which were once considered too costly and resource-intensive to deploy, company officials say.

Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/261.1>

How Well Do You Understand The Do Not Call Laws?

By David Sims, TMCnet CRM Alert Columnist

How well do you understand the Do Not Call laws? Take the five-question quiz on the Web site of Chris Harshbarger of Harshbarger & Associates, LLC, which offers Telemarketing Compliance consultations on the matter.

Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/262.1>

Forrester's Take on CRM in 2006: 10 Trends

Forrester finds are the 10 CRM trends to watch in 2006, broken down into three general groups: Five trends emanating from the fact that they find enterprises are digesting their CRM technology investments and striving to get more worth out of these expenditures, three evident as CRM software technology firms continue to adapt to the demands of their customers and two resulting from the role professional services providers will play in helping enterprises get more value from CRM.

Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/263.1>

Sphere Announces Spherical 5

By Greg Galitzine, Editorial Director, INTERNET TELEPHONY

Building on standard XML and SOAP technology, Sphere now offers Spherical Web Services which is intended to provide access to the rich communications services of the software-based Spherical IP-PBX. A key component of Spherical is a Software Development Kit (SDK) that delivers a platform-neutral and language-neutral set of development tools for fast, flexible and repeatable application development and integration.

Read the article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/264.1>

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The Art of Workforce Optimization™





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

Keeping Up With Uptime

As you may recall, last month I set out to interview a number of on-demand CRM vendors on the topic of service reliability. As with the case of Salesforce.com's outages, many customer relationship management decision-makers were left wondering if the on-demand vendor they chose was able to provide them with the reliability they needed to keep their companies running at all times.

To get a fair and accurate picture of what vendors have to say about their own reliability this month, I bring you two more interviews, this time from NetSuite and SAP.

My first interview was via e-mail with Sean Rollings, Senior Director of Product Marketing at [NetSuite](http://www.netsuite.com) (<http://www.netsuite.com>). ([news - alert](#))

RT: How would you compare your hosted offering to software-based and other hosted competitors?

SR: NetSuite is a software as a service (SaaS) leader. In contrast to many traditional software providers who are retrofitting their software and hosting it through third-party services on a customer-by-customer basis, NetSuite was built from the ground up as a Web-native solution dedicated to a SaaS-only delivery. In contrast to other SaaS and hosted solutions, NetSuite is managed in a multitenant environment for peak

new features and functionality for all customers with one major and two minor upgrades annually. The bane of traditional software is its rigidity. NetSuite's NetFlex technology platform makes NetSuite the most customizable ASP, with point-and-click configuration, rich customization, Web services to extend NetSuite to legacy and third-party applications, and the Applications Program providing third-party applications built for seamless integration with NetSuite as the system of record. All NetFlex customization and extension upgrade seamlessly with every upgrade.

RT: What is an acceptable amount of downtime for a hosted provider?

SR: NetSuite is the only SaaS vendor to provide a 99.5 percent uptime guarantee or money back, which was effective to all of NetSuite customers since April 2004. Since then, NetSuite has actually delivered 99.9 percent uptime. This is the acceptable downtime, but it would be great to see other vendors at least guarantee some level of uptime to every customer.

RT: What sort of remedies should a customer seek as a result of excessive downtime?

SR: NetSuite guarantees our uptime and has a standard procedure for investigating downtime and, when warranted, being credited per the terms of the guarantee.

As with the case of Salesforce.com's outages, many customer relationship management decision-makers were left wondering if the on-demand vendor they chose was able to provide them with the reliability they needed to keep their companies running at all times.

performance and cost effectiveness for the customer. In contrast to traditional software solutions that provide upgrades every three to four years, NetSuite provides a rapid rollout of

RT: At what point should customers consider switching hosted providers?

SR: Under the following circumstances:

- When the software does not manage the business processes for the company and/or the industry either through standard or custom functionality;
- When downtime becomes excessive — this threshold of business continuity will be very low for any company;
- When the capability of the system was oversold by the vendor;
- When a growing business crosses the threshold to more sophisticated business processes, reporting and/or compliance; and
- When they are geographically challenged by currency, issues of international trade, language, etc.

RT: Has your hosted solution been down yet? Please detail.

SR: We have exceeded our 99.5 percent uptime guarantee by delivering 99.9 percent uptime every month since our program was introduced in April 2004.

RT: What are you doing to ensure zero downtime?

SR: By offering the following:

- Superior architecture of the database, application server and application;
- Smart loading servers for peak performance; and
- Close monitoring of server and application performance with quick strike remedies before downtime occurs.

RT: Do you see downtime potential growing as the customer base does?

SR: No.

RT: How is your on-demand customer retention rate?

SR: Above the industry average.

Next Up: SAP

Next, I spoke with Ralf Von Sosen, Vice President, CRM Solution Marketing at SAP (<http://www.sap.com>). ([news - alert](#)) The company recently introduced an on-demand product, so I was intrigued to get some more information.

SAP is targeting their hosted offering to large companies, not necessarily com-

peting with Salesforce.com. SAP is helping companies manage the tactical opportunities they have today while keeping true to the strategic initiatives of CRM. Most small companies, of course, don't have such concerns — yet. Perhaps the benefits of this thinking shouldn't be limited to the largest of companies. Even small businesses can benefit from SAP's offering as they allow companies to act immediately and grow strategically.

SAP says they have a long-term vision of the customer-centric enterprise while providing a seamless migration path from on-demand to premise-based systems such as the MYSAP CRM Suite.

The core components of the newly announced SAP CRM On Demand Solution are as follows:

- Sales on Demand;
- Service on Demand; and
- Marketing on Demand.

The first of these solutions has already been released, while the latter are coming within the next two quarters, priced at \$75/user/month/module. Buying all three at the \$125/user/month rate, proving to be the better deal, gets you the entire suite. The average customer purchases 100 seats, and by doing some rudimentary math, I estimate a customer would spend approximately \$150,000 per year for all three modules.

You might think that truly large companies have more than 100 seats. SAP explains that they will sometimes sell their solutions to a division of a Fortune-class company.

SAP decided that the multitenancy model, which is frequently used in hosted CRM solutions, was not an ideal fit for what they were trying to accomplish. Instead, they decided to go with something they call "isolated tenancy." In the former scenario, multiple users share the same application, however their data are isolated from other customers. In the latter case, each company gets its own instance of the software to run.

The reason for this slight change is to generate increased security, reliability and uptime.

So while Ralf was telling me about his company's new service, I couldn't help wondering — what about the uptime,

Ralf? After all, uptime is the reason I decided to focus on the topic in this March issue.

Thankfully, after Ralf explained a bit more about what his new on-demand product can do, he addressed the topic gracefully, saying "I can look you squarely in eye and say we have had nothing but zero percent down time...ever." Of course, the humor here is that the service wasn't even 30 days old when we talked! Still, it's not a bad start.

Ralf said he wouldn't have thought reliability would be an issue a few months ago, but now it's on the top of everyone's list. This has changed the conversation with some of his larger enterprise customers.

I asked, then, what is an acceptable amount of downtime for a hosted provider?

His answer? Zero. Which is what I (and you) had hoped for. They do guarantee 99.5 percent uptime, but will have scheduled downtime like others. Ralf mentioned that SAP partners with IBM services, which host their solution, helping to ensure uptime.

Siebel (now Oracle) also uses IBM and says the same thing about their hosted solution. Ralph mentioned that post-acquisition, Oracle might not be thrilled with their software running on IBM's DB2, as Oracle's bread and butter database competes with DB2.

On the matter of remedies, Ralf replied that customers are free to switch hosted providers, as there are many choices out there.

So there you have it. Over the last few months, we have had comments from the on-demand CRM world on what most every company in the space is doing to ensure their services stay up at all costs. At this point, anyone else who has downtime will become a target of immediate industry scrutiny by the press. There is immense pressure on all to make sure their services stay up and that there are dramatic differences in how many of these companies are approaching the uptime issue. If you are interested in keeping up with uptime and other aspects of the CRM industry, feel free to keep reading my columns and my blog at Tehrani.com. [CIS](#)

THE BOARDROOM REPORT™



WITH NADJI TEHRANI



Interior Concepts: We Provide Solutions That Fit

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 David Kendrick, President of call center furniture provider Interior Concepts (<http://www.interiorconcepts.com>). (news - alert)

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

DK: We are a manufacturer that provides custom furniture solutions for call centers. We provide a turnkey service that begins with initial furniture design and space planning, and extends through the manufacturing and installation of the furniture. Our furniture solutions also include a wide range of ergonomic accessories and components. While we are a manufacturer, our philosophy is not to be just a manufacturer — our goal is to truly become a partner with the companies that we're serving. In support of this philosophy, one way we're quite different from the traditional furniture companies is that we develop direct relationships with our call center

customers as opposed to selling through a furniture dealer or independent distributor. This really facilitates the partnership, and our customer ends up working with the same Interior Concepts people regardless of where they locate the call center. We very much understand the call center business and certainly know how to take care of our customers.

NT: I think that's very unique. I'm not aware of any other companies that do that.

DK: Most commercial contract furniture is sold through dealers or independent distributors. When we initially targeted this [call center] business, we discovered several things. One is that it was diffi-

cult to find furniture dealers who really understood the call center business. Also, by the very nature of the call center business, if a customer is a private telemarketer, where they're located corporately doesn't matter, because this month, they're going to be placing a center on the East Coast, three months later it may be a new center in the Midwest, and three months after that it may be on the West Coast. Our direct relationship gets us closer to the customer. We understand them, and the benefit to our customer is that they work with the same Interior Concepts people regardless of where they're placing their centers. It makes for a very good partnership.

NT: I have always wondered how technology companies can get the type of business they deserve from these distributors. It seems to me the distributors, who might carry 150 products in the same field, are naturally going to try to sell the one that makes them the most profit. The other companies get left behind.

DK: You are exactly on target with that. From a logical business standpoint, they will sell either the product that makes them the most profit, or the one that's

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easiest to sell. The most profitable product and the easiest to sell product maybe not be one and the same.

NT: Frankly, I would never want to put my business into the hands of the distributors.

DK: It truly depends on the market being served and the business model being used. With our call center business, we provide custom furniture solutions with very short lead times and take pride in the level of service that we offer to our customers; from our vantage point having a “person in the middle” can actually detract from our goals. Of course, you may not find many distributors who agree with this assessment.

NT: That’s true! For the next question, what are the greatest challenges your company faces?

DK: Our greatest challenge is to continuously do more with less. The furniture business is extremely competitive, which is very good for the customer. But while we’re having to keep our selling prices competitive, we, in turn, have been hit extremely hard with material price increases from our own vendors. Not only by material price increases, but such things as metal and fuel surcharges. We’ve seen more vendor price increases in the past year than probably the previous five to six years combined. As a manufacturer, we get sandwiched in the middle. So the challenge is to continuously find better ways to produce. Also, on the selling side, the competitive pressures are compounded by foreign imports. We address this by specializing or practicing niche marketing. While a customer can easily purchase standard furniture items from China; they can’t purchase a customized call center floor within a very short lead time. On the cost side, things like healthcare costs continue to go up, up and away, and all of this creates the common need to find ways to do more with less.

NT: That’s a very good point, and it makes a lot of sense. So...what have you determined to be the solution to these problems?

DK: It’s interesting. The challenge and the solution are one and the same. By that, I mean the challenge is to do more with less; the solution is to do more with less. As a manufacturer, we have to continuously increase production from the front door to the back door without commensurate increases in overhead or operating costs. On the manufacturing floor, for example, you can invest in new and better equipment, but that isn’t enough. From a total business standpoint, we are responding to the challenge through “information technology.” For a custom manufacturing company, we have an absolutely extraordinary CRM system in place. At the click of a mouse, I can tell you everything about any order: in-house, past and present. From my laptop, I can pull up CAD drawings and any and all communications, including e-mails and voice mails, for any given order for the entire duration of that order, all the way from the initial quotation phase to the installation, even down to installation photos. As part of the normal installation procedure, the installer will take photographs, and those go into our computer system as well. Every quotation we do is electronically entered into the system. If a customer should call me on the phone, for example, and want to discuss an order, I can immediately pull it up. More importantly, from an overall business standpoint, through our CRM system I can maintain a very good business awareness, particularly in terms of which customers are doing what. So it puts a lot of information at our fingertips. Also, with the information technology, we’re using the Internet more and more in terms of presenting and selling our products. We’re really addressing the business challenge through our CRM process.

NT: That’s impressive. Did you develop the software yourself, or did you buy it off the shelf?

DK: We purchased software, and then customized it for our business. We’re using an ERP (enterprise resource planning) solution called SyteLine. The CRM system we use, Frontstep, ties to that [ERP software] in a unique way. The Frontstep CRM software integrates with our manufacturing system. It’s difficult for many manufacturing companies to implement CRM, even if they produce a standard or commodity product, yet we’ve been very successful in applying CRM to a custom manufactured product. What we’re doing is quite unique. Every quotation that goes into our system follows a pipeline, and a mathematical formula assigns a certain probability of a quote closing, or becoming an order, based on where that quote is within the pipeline. For example, if a quote goes to revision B, we know the probability of closing it goes up, otherwise the customer wouldn’t be interested in making any modifications to the quote. The probability continues to increase if the revision level goes to “C” or “D”. Another benefit of the system is a very good forecasting tool. We can easily see what’s sitting out there in the way of pending business. Based on the probability assessments, our system will tell us what we’re likely to see in closed business based on our historical capture rates. With the quotation/order information close at hand and the entire history of every order being captured, we can and do provide exemplary customer service.

A customer buying our furniture for his or her call center only wants to know, “Are we going to have our furniture on time?” The customers, and rightly so, couldn’t care less whether we’re automated or whether we operate out of caves. The automation and the CRM is a means of differentiating yourself and providing that customer with the very best service. That’s what you have to do to survive.

The access to information is extremely critical. So we're very pleased with the progress we're making.

NT: For good reason. What are some of the more recent developments in your company?

DK: Again, the most significant development is how we're using information technology, and particularly how we're integrating the CRM system into our manufacturing system. This really gives us some strategic advantages. With the possible exception of some very limited QuickShip programs that other companies have, we offer the fastest lead times or turnaround times in the industry. Even for large call centers, we operate year-round with a four week or less lead time. CRM will only improve that. We'll get to the point that, electronically, once we receive a purchase order, we'll be able to generate the paperwork and release that order for production literally the same day. That process could shave an additional week or more from the lead time. We already offer the shortest, on average, lead time in the industry, and through CRM, it will only get better.

NT: Could you share with us your vision of the future trends for the contact center industry?

DK: We are very much a "niche marketer," and we plan to remain that way. In addition to our call center business we specialize in educational environments, but we have no desire to go out and compete for what we call the "traditional contract furniture" business. Our vision is to continue to make the buying process easier for our customers, and a part of this is to make the buying process more interactive, including the ability to fully generate a custom-designed floor plan and pricing online. The key to this is "custom." Obviously, this capability already exists with some furniture products, but typically those are standard products. Our overall

vision is to continue to help our customers, make it easy to buy, and make it very advantageous for them to locate their call centers in this country.

Our customer base includes some of the largest telemarketing companies in the industry with 10-, 15- and 20-year relationships being very common. While our customer retention rate is extremely high, our goal is to give these companies even more reasons to buy from Interior Concepts.

NT: What would you say is your company's core competency?

DK: It's really understanding our customers' needs and providing solutions that meet those needs. It just so happens that our product is furniture for call centers. Our custom focus would allow us to be successful if the product were something other than furniture for call centers. We think that's the driving force. Also, in meeting our customers' needs, as an organization, we don't "manage backwards" from the financial numbers. The numbers are important, but we think that by taking care of our customers, the numbers will take care of themselves. Traditionally, that has always proven to be the case. We're very informal as an organization — very non-bureaucratic. Sometimes, we do things financially that probably wouldn't make sense to most companies, but do make sense to us. In our minds, if it takes extra money to meet the needs of our customer, then we do it. As far as our return on investment, if that keeps the customer coming back, then that's what we're all about. Again, our customer retention rate is extremely high. Once we develop a relationship with a customer, we typically don't lose that customer, and we like to keep it that way.

NT: What is Interior Concepts' positioning statement?

DK: Before commenting on that, I'd like to say that we have and use a marketing tagline that is, "Solutions That Fit." The

way that we position ourselves is with our custom design and manufacturing approach, so we can absolutely offer our customers the very best utilization of their floor space. I can say with one thousand percent certainty that no other furniture company can do it like we do it. Our utilization of space either translates into additional dollars earned or dollars saved for our customers. This is really how we position ourselves.

NT: How do you differentiate your company from your competitors?

DK: The way that we're different is that unlike most contract furniture systems, we use a one-inch panel system. This allows us, along with our custom manufacturing approach, to do a lot more with the space. This gets back into the "solutions that fit" tagline that we use. Because of the one-inch system, we can typically provide to the customer either more work stations in the space, which obviously translates into more revenue, or we can give them larger workstations and/or more aisle space and common areas. Either way, our one-inch system combined with our custom approach ends up being a significant benefit in either more stations or better use of the space. For example, we were just successful in obtaining the business of a very large call center in Oklahoma consisting of over 600 stations. The difference between our quote and our competitors' quote is that we were able to fit in an additional 30 to 40 stations. That's typically what we see in these larger centers. This gets back to offering the very best solutions for the floor space. Additionally, we provide the largest and easiest-to-use cable management capacity in the industry; this also translates into significant cost savings for our customers.

I don't think anyone else out there does call centers like we do them.

NT: Thank you very much for your valuable time.

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CIS

Ed Lauing
President and CEO
Nuasis Corp.



For this month's Executive Spotlight, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* speaks with Ed Lauing, President and CEO of [Nuasis Corp.](http://www.nuasis.com) (<http://www.nuasis.com>). ([news](#) - [alert](#))

CIS: What do you see as key dynamics driving the call center and CRM markets today?

Ed Lauing (EL): Companies are in a stranglehold with their legacy systems. The infrastructure of traditional vendors and technologies are too complex. Companies can't adapt them fast enough or at reasonable cost. Deployment is too complex. A huge driver for the industry today is to simplify the old models. That's where convergence comes in.

In our case, we've been fortunate to start with a clean slate. We just took a whole different approach — something very different. It's a totally software solution that sits on your existing infrastructure. That translates to significantly different business benefits. It's not just cool technology. The result is multimedia, multisite contact center software that sits on a converged IP network, but the driver was simplicity, which means lower TCO and lower deployment cost. A very simplified model.

CIS: What are the new generation of challenges facing call centers today?

EL: I've said it before, the industry is stuck. It's difficult for companies to take their call centers to a next level because legacy infrastructure isn't flexible. I've used a phrase often that applies — "Frankenstein Infrastructure." I think the greatest need of our industry is to offer an alternative to the "Frankenstein Infrastructure" created by bolting together a bunch of disjointed stuff. There's no reason for enterprises to be spending scarce budget dollars on complicated integrations — tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars per enter-

prise. For many companies, they simply choose not to deploy applications that can improve call center efficiencies and service because the cost is prohibitive.

CIS: What's the importance of voice over IP in today's call center? Do you agree with some that VoIP is "the tail wagging the dog"?

EL: I don't agree with the tail-wagging thing at all. First, when we decided to create a new company, we didn't decide to create a new [VoIP \(define - news - alert\)](#) company, we decided to create a new contact center company. It turned out that VoIP was the best enabler to simplify systems and reduce costs. It becomes the delivery mechanism for all our business benefits, so we think it's huge for the contact center.

But many solutions providers in the industry got it all wrong. Many have focused on VoIP as transport, and transport cost reductions. That's not the exciting stuff. This technology is all about solving the customer service issues — multimedia customer contacts, routing to agents anywhere, lowering costs. It really does enable the business solutions.

CIS: What types of companies are deploying your solution?

EL: It runs the gamut from companies with single site, mission-critical call centers to large companies with multiple dispersed centers. Most are choosing Nuasis because of our simplified deployment and our switchless software model. We work seamlessly with any incumbent PBX, whether it's TDM or IP.

I'll give you a couple of examples. A recent customer in the utility industry

reviewed 14 vendors and chose Nuasis to replace another vendor in six centers. We will cut over those six centers within as many weeks. One center per week. That's an example of how we've simplified the system model. Two major vendors were not invited to bid because their solution required a new PBX, which the customer didn't require.

Another customer replaced legacy ACDs in four locations. In fact, they chose not to relocate one of the TDM switches to another site because it would cost them more to re-deploy a fully depreciated ACD switch than to deploy our software on industry-standard servers.

These are leaders in their respective industries. And, I might add, they are companies in traditionally conservative industries — pharmaceuticals and utilities — not companies inclined to take risks. But they understood the benefits and return on investment that our solution provides. They understood that the traditional switches were not a good answer in the short-term and certainly not for the long-term.

CIS: Share some details on one customer and the benefits they realized.

EL: We can take any customer and run through a similar list of benefits. Let's take the utility customer I mentioned that has four sites deployed. Deployment costs were fixed. Rolling out sites beyond the first site was at a fraction of the installation costs and hardware costs of traditional TDM switch deployments, which would place a completely duplicate TDM switch at each site.

Each site deployed screen pop to every agent's desktop, reducing call han-

dle time and improving productivity. The deployment of the screen pop was a fixed cost of \$10,000 for the CRM connection: no additional cost for the screen pop application at each site. Each agent has a single multimedia desktop to answer calls, e-mail and Web chat. And they all have a feature we call Shutters that automatically opens, places and closes desktop applications required on the call — another major productivity gain. Our customers typically see 22 to 30 percent agent productivity gains as a result of these features.

The four sites are networked together at no additional cost for the networking functionality. Our system is a single, distributed system that deploys over multiple sites as a standard capability. The system routes customer contacts across a larger pool of agents over multiple locations. Therefore, fewer agents are required to handle the same volume of calls, lowering labor costs. Plus, the distributed, multisite system offers inherent disaster recovery capabilities. In the event of an outage at one site, calls are automatically routed to other sites. Every customer sees these cost savings and benefits.

Sorry for the litany of features, but we've really done something very different from the other guys! It shows in the flexibility of the system to adapt to the business and the productivity gains from the feature set. We've taken a quantum leap with this product.

CIS: What would you say is your company's greatest core competency?

EL: We know call centers. We have domain expertise in the call center application. That's the message. We've attracted top executives with years of experience at leading call center companies. Carol Snell, co-founder of Aspect; and Kevin McPartlan, former VP of Product Architecture, are examples. They know the call center's needs. They understand customer service. They know how to build a new company.

Coupled with that, we have a vision for innovations to take the call center

forward. We're not "technology bigots" — we're not a company that has 16 products in a sales person's briefcase and, oh yeah, one of them is the call center. So we are differentiated by our understanding of the business process of the call center, and our customers have said that to us. With some of the big, every-

day street brands, customers are shocked by their lack of expertise and are stunned at our core expertise in that area.

We "get it" and, with the luxury of designing a new solution from scratch, we have done it.

CIS: Thank you for your time. **CIS**

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VoiceLog LLC



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



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

FrontRange Solutions Unveils GoldMine IP Voice Suite

FrontRange's ([news - alert](#)) newly announced customer communications product, GoldMine IP Voice Suite, combines two business technologies: IP telephony and customer relationship management (CRM). The offering delivers an enterprise-class VoIP telephony application that includes full integration to GoldMine Corporate Edition CRM to help companies elevate the quality of interactions with their customers, which in turn can boost sales, increase customer loyalty and raise the productivity of service teams. The new product includes an advanced software-based IP telephony system (FrontRange IP Office) with unified messaging, auto-attendant, inbound and outbound productivity applications, as well as easy-to-use management tools. For example, as calls ring to service employees, GoldMine IP Voice Suite triggers screen pops of customer records from the GoldMine database. For outbound calling campaigns, users can click to dial from customer records, as well as other features added to improve productivity such as preview dialing, calling scripts and campaign status reporting. <http://www.frontrange.com>



In the January and February issues' announcements of the Product of the Year Award winners, Amae Software (<http://www.amaesoftware.com>) was inadvertently miscategorized under the "CRM" heading. The correct category for Amae's product, the Amae Customer Integration (CI) Suite, is "Survey/Feedback Solutions." We regret the error.

— Tracey Schelmetic

Teleperformance USA And CallTech Communications Merge

SR.Teleperformance, ([news - alert](#)) a Paris-based provider of outsourced customer care, has announced the merger of its two most significant U.S. business entities: Teleperformance USA and CallTech Communications, LLC. Teleperformance USA operates in five countries with over 10,600 contact center stations and 11,600 employees, providing U.S. domestic, nearshore and offshore customer care, technical support and inbound sales solutions to U.S.-based companies in multiple industries. CallTech has over 4,800 employees in nine U.S. call centers and provides technical support and customer services to companies primarily in the telecommunications, technology and Internet services sectors. The merged company retains the Teleperformance name and is comprised of 32 contact centers, over 16,500 employees and more than 15,000 workstations.

Dominic Dato, CEO of Teleperformance USA, said, "We continue to be extremely impressed with the management team of CallTech and the systems the company has developed to provide better management reporting and analysis, especially the Call Center Management reporting System (CCMS). This merger will generate an even stronger outsourcing alternative for our U.S. clients seeking domestic and/or offshore solutions."

<http://www.srteleperformance.com>

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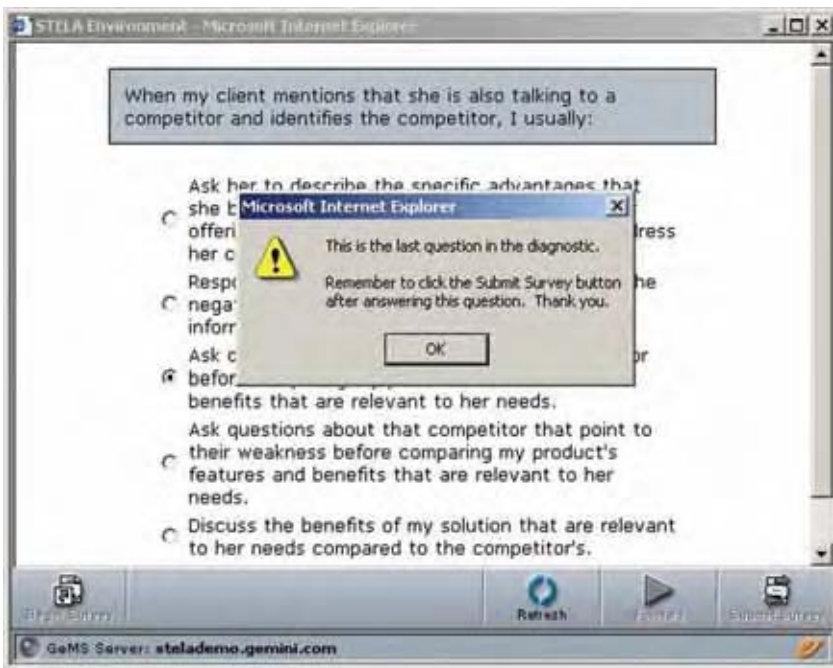
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Richardson Launches Selling Diagnostic Tool

Richardson, (news - alert) a sales training and consulting firm, has announced the launch of a new Web-based Consultative Selling Diagnostic Assessment Tool as a part of its sales, service and sales management performance improvement solutions. Richardson's new Consultative Selling Diagnostic Assessment Tool was created to provide salespeople with insights into their sales approach and effectiveness. It consists of 24 targeted sales performance-based questions drawn from Richardson's 27 years of experience and research in working with large sales organizations. As salespeople respond to the 24 questions and make sales strategy and skill decisions, each participant receives specific and confidential feedback on his/her strengths and areas for growth. The data provide salespeople with an awareness they can use to maximize their strengths and develop plans to close skill gaps.

The Consultative Selling Diagnostic Assessment Tool can be used stand-alone or integrated with Richardson's Consultative Selling classroom and/or interactive Richardson QuickSkills e-learning training programs. Developed with Skill Measure, a developer of assessment and diagnostic tools, the Consultative Selling Assessment Tool complements the Developmental Sales Coaching Diagnostic Assessment Tool for Managers.

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Salesnet Introduces 25th Anniversary Edition

On-demand CRM provider **Salesnet** ([news](#) - [alert](#)) has announced the launch of the 25th Anniversary Edition of its enterprise on-demand CRM product, which offers 250 new features and heralds Salesnet's CRM venture into marketing automation, including lead management, campaign management, HTML e-mails and more. To prepare current and potential customers for the new release, Salesnet launched an official preview Web site, [Salesnet25.com](#), in September 2005. Each week, since the launch of [Salesnet25.com](#), the company has revealed several new features for customers to review. By demonstrating the nuances of each new feature in an interactive way, customer and prospects have been able to digest the features without being overwhelmed with a slew of new capabilities all at once.

The Salesnet 25th Anniversary edition includes enhancements and new functionality, such as a new lead management module to help improve sales effectiveness, as only qualified leads are "converted" to sales; campaign management to allow users to track and measure the effectiveness of specific marketing campaigns and store campaign information in one central location; HTML e-mail, which provides designated individuals with the ability to create HTML e-mails using a WYSIWYG e-mail editor; and user interface customization and administration, which enables companies to customize the application to match any company's corporate vernacular and style.

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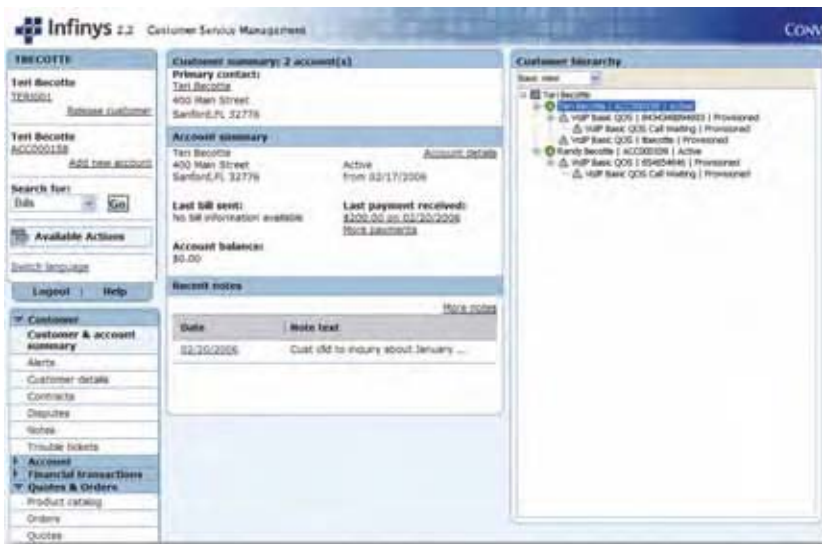
Convergys Merges CRM And Billing With Infinys CSM

Convergys Corporation, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of outsourced customer care, human resources and billing services, has announced a new upgrade to Infinys that makes it the first modular, convergent billing solution to link the worlds of customer relationship management (CRM) and business support systems (BSS) for communications service providers, according to the company. Infinys CSM brings customer order and billing information directly to the primary screens that CSRs reference. It presents the information so CSRs can resolve inquiries in real time, increasing responsiveness and first-call resolution while reducing call processing time by up to 40 percent.

Convergys' experience managing more than 54,000 CSRs handling about 1.7 million interactions per day in 68 contact centers worldwide was instrumental in developing the CSM application, which complements service providers' current CRM and billing systems. Infinys CSM can be implemented as a standalone application or as part of an integrated Infinys solution.

The solution offers: online charging, which provides carrier-grade online charging across both prepaid and postpaid services; true "quadruple play" convergence support to enable the real-time creation, bundling and management of voice, video, data and wireless services across both wireless and wireline delivery networks; Linux support to provide operators with a higher degree of hardware platform flexibility; and reduced cost of ownership through reduced systems integration, customization and operation costs.

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Business Objects To Acquire Firstlogic

Business intelligence solutions provider Business Objects ([news - alert](#)) recently announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire privately-held Firstlogic, Inc., ([news - alert](#)) a global provider of enterprise data quality solutions and services. Building on the company's EIM (enterprise information management) strategy, the acquisition aims to provide customers with a single, consistent view of their business, improve the trust and confidence in the information needed to make better decisions and accelerate compliance initiatives.

The acquisition will be an all-cash transaction of approximately \$69 million and will be accounted for under the purchase method of accounting. In 2006, the transaction is expected to be accretive to Business Objects on a non-GAAP basis and dilutive on a GAAP basis due to one-time charges and purchase accounting adjustments. The acquisition is subject to regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions, and is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2006.

<http://www.businessobjects.com> and <http://www.firstlogic.com>



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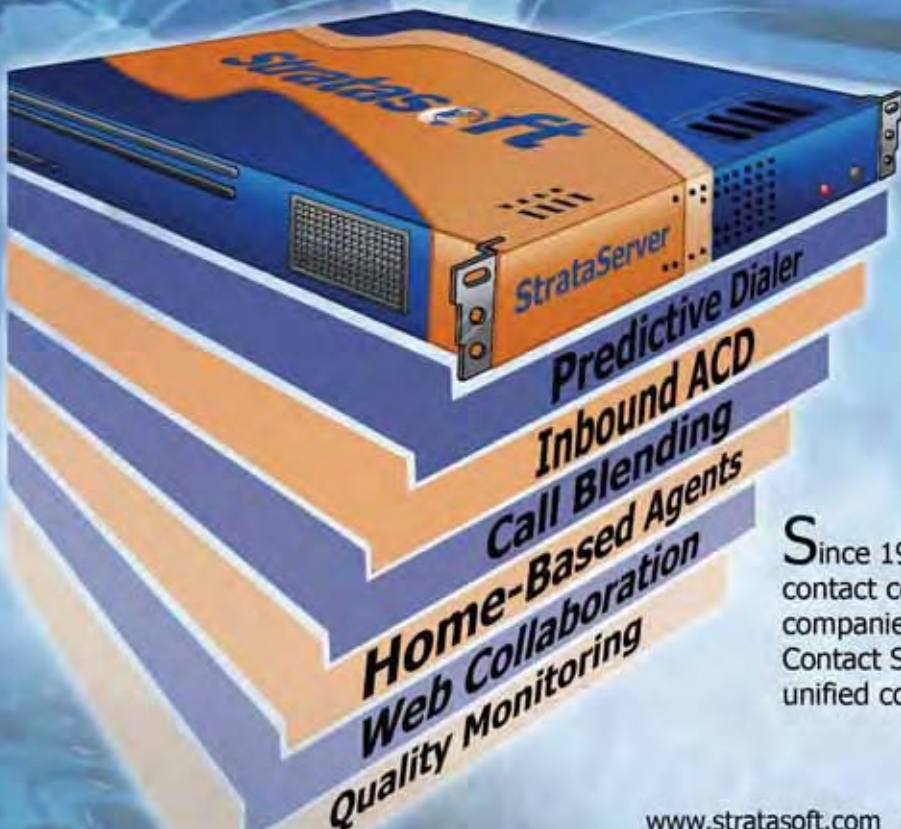
NICE And Avaya Extend Alliance

NICE Systems ([news - alert](#)) and Avaya Inc. ([news - alert](#)) have announced they have signed an agreement that extends their scope of collaboration to deliver the benefits of IP contact centers to businesses. Building on their existing partnership and a shared vision for IP-based contact centers, the two companies have developed a joint offering of a suite of applications, are pursuing strategic marketing initiatives together, and aim to increase resources to leverage shared business opportunities. The joint solution provides quality monitoring, branch recording, centralized storage, liability and interaction analytics. It is an integral part of NICE's unified product architecture, and leverages the Communication Manager API of Avaya Applications Enablement Services (AES), a suite of Web services that provides rich integration with Avaya's converged communications applications.

As part of the Avaya Customer Interaction Suite, Avaya's IP contact center solutions can help businesses seamlessly link together a distributed environment, including agents, branch-office employees and knowledge experts in any location — to serve customers with improved speed, accuracy and efficiency. Avaya gives contact centers the ability to use IP-distributed architectures to flatten, consolidate and extend operations by supporting new remote, branch, satellite or global agents. This can result in reduced costs by removing network hierarchy application and server duplication, as well as management overhead.
<http://www.nice.com> and <http://www.avaya.com>



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Verint Expands ULTRA Actionable Intelligence Suite

Verint Systems Inc., ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of analytic software-based solutions for communications interception, networked video security and business intelligence, has announced ULTRA IntelliScreen, a new analytical solution for generating actionable intelligence from unstructured data displayed on desktop screens. IntelliScreen is the latest addition to the ULTRA Analytics suite, which consists of IntelliFind speech analytics and IntelliMiner performance analytics solutions. The trio provides a comprehensive view of business processes, customer interactions and performance trends and delivers actionable intelligence about quality and performance issues across the enterprise. ULTRA IntelliScreen monitors activity on the desktop screen of a contact center agent or back-office worker and tracks application usage, data entry and screen content. IntelliScreen then analyzes these data and can trigger a broad range of actions and alerts based on the resulting intelligence. These alerts can provide insight into operational performance and business process issues, automate agent assistance and trigger target coaching or other actions.

With ULTRA IntelliScreen, enterprise transaction information, such as call outcome or transaction value, is intelligently linked to customer interactions. The data can then facilitate optimization of front- and back-office processes, enable targeted data mining of specific transaction types and power more effective speech analysis. ULTRA's root cause analytics automatically surface potential quality and performance issues that are not yet identified before they impact operational efficiency or threaten customer satisfaction.

In other Verint news, the company recently announced its acquisition of **CM Insight Limited**, a privately-held customer management solution provider that helps enterprises enhance their customer experience and improve the quality and performance of their contact center operations. Founded in 1998, CM Insight has 23 employees and is headquartered in Weybridge, UK.

<http://www.verint.com>

ATSI Warns Of Toll-Free Fraud

The **Association of TeleServices International (ATSI)**, ([news](#) - [alert](#)) the international association for the owners of telephone answering services and small call centers, has issued a fraud warning to all businesses that use toll-free numbers for advertising. ATSI has also notified the FBI. Businesses that use toll-free numbers for advertising are being targeted by fraudsters who illegally divert calls to themselves to capture inbound sales calls, revenue and customer names and data intended for legitimate firms.

ATSI has stated that it's important businesses understand how the fraud is instituted: The perpetrator calls a legitimate business's long-distance provider and tells the provider that he or she is from that legitimate company. He or she explains that due to an equipment failure or some other emergency, the legitimate business's toll-free number needs to be rerouted so it is terminated on the criminal's telephone system. Then, when the phone number is called, it gets answered by the scammer, who sells similar services. In one instance, the perpetrators put a system in place that allowed them to reroute calls further so they could pick times of the day and week to take a company's calls. At other times of day, they routed calls back to the company so it was less likely the legitimate company would discover that its lines had been hijacked.

ATSI suggests that companies check their toll-free numbers regularly at different times of the day and week to make sure they are ringing to their business. Also, companies should consider creating passwords or other types of security measures with their long-distance providers to limit how toll-free lines can be rerouted.

<http://www.atsi.org>

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Amcat Wins Contract With German Outsourcer

In a three-way contest against rival vendors, **Amcat**, a provider of call center technology solutions, has announced the win of a major contract to supply an inbound/outbound contact center solution to **walter TeleMedien-Group**, ([news - alert](#)) one of Germany's largest call, communication and service center companies. The initial deal is for 620 seats with a further 1,000 to be rolled out by end of 2006.

The General Manager for Telemedien Verwaltungs GmbH (IT-division of walter TeleMedien-Group), Manfred Plaar, commented, "In order to make the right selection, we developed a trial campaign involving three short-listed vendors of contact center solutions, all of which were invited to work on campaigns with a leading German mail-order company. Amcat came out the clear winner on all fronts. The agents were able to embrace the system immediately. They liked the ease-of-use, the simple-to-understand screens and the powerful dialing functionality. As a result, productivity using the Amcat system was highest. In addition, our business is incredibly fast-moving and dynamic."

The initial distributed contact center system has been installed at the company's headquarters in Ettlingen and at two locations in Magdeburg. All sites will be connected via the company's wide area network. Amcat will provide on-going support, development and consultancy services from its office based in Munster, Germany.

<http://www.amcat.com>



Inova Introduces OnTrack

Inova Solutions ([news - alert](#)) recently introduced Inova OnTrack, the company's next generation of LED displays. OnTrack displays combine an energy-efficient design with new features for easy installation, simple operation and fast troubleshooting, helping lower the cost of ownership for this visual communication technology. The OnTrack product line includes the M Series, which plugs into an electrical outlet but uses up to 70 percent less power than other displays, and the patent-pending X Series, which makes use of power over Ethernet technology to draw both data and power from a single Ethernet connection. The X Series eliminates the cost of installing AC outlets and runs on only 15 watts of power, providing significant energy savings.



All OnTrack models feature integrated network connectivity to provide instant data delivery over standard Cat-5 cabling. Ultra-bright LEDs, a wide viewing angle and an anti-glare coating provide optimum readability to distances of 100 feet and beyond, offering broad coverage for open environments such as contact centers, network operation centers and manufacturing floors. Lightweight construction with multiple mounting options, including VESA, allows easy installation, while onboard status lights and remote display access through Telnet or SSH make for quick troubleshooting and simple firmware upgrades.

<http://www.inovasolutions.com>

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Merced Systems Launches Version 2.7

[Merced Systems Inc.](#), ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of contact center and operational performance management applications, has announced the release of Merced Performance Suite 2.7. The Merced Performance Suite was designed to increase the efficiency of contact centers by consolidating data from disparate sources, delivering advanced analytics, providing personalized dashboards, and integrating workflow and process improvement tools.

The version 2.7 enhancements were added to allow customers to more rapidly automate critical managerial tasks through additional pre-configured workflows and new offline features. Additionally, enhanced data management capabilities further reduce application administration and deliver the lowest total cost of ownership on the market.

The new version introduces features such as additional pre-configured workflows, which represent best-practice processes for agent development and performance improvement plan (PIP) tracking; extended data management capabilities to allow customers to more easily and rapidly extend their applications; and offline features to integrate paper-based processes with online activity tracking and archiving.

<http://www.mercedsystems.com>

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Interactive Intelligence To Launch Hosted Notification Service

Interactive Intelligence Inc. ([news - alert](#)) has announced it will offer a hosted notification service, branded under the name icNotify. icNotify was designed to cut costs associated with outbound customer interactions by automating traditional manual processes and eliminating the need for on-premise customer equipment and network bandwidth. The icNotify service, initially targeted at financial service institutions and physician offices, provides outbound notification services for automated messaging, with the added benefit of giving subscribers flexible, multichannel contact options based on their unique needs.

Examples of how businesses can use the icNotify service include financial institutions that want to send customers notification of loan status, fraud alerts, deposit confirmations and portfolio updates. Physician's offices can use the service for notifications such as prescription reminders, appointment reminders, "agent-less" health education campaigns and patient satisfaction surveys.

The icNotify service is switch-independent, so it can work with a variety of third-party PBXs and IP-PBXs. The service will be delivered through landline and mobile phones, e-mail, fax, pagers, PDA devices and short message service-enabled devices. The icNotify service will also make use of text-to-speech, speech recognition, pre-recorded messages, on-the-fly message recording and self-service options — the latter designed to minimize inbound call volume in response to outbound notifications.

<http://www.inin.com>



Talisma Announces Talisma Professional Edition

Talisma Corporation, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of customer interaction management solutions, has announced the immediate availability of Talisma Professional Edition for small and mid-sized companies and departments within large enterprises. Leveraging the cost-effective Internet medium, Talisma's new applications offer single or multiple online communication channels, such as self service, chat and e-mail, helping enable businesses

to deliver improved customer service. Talisma Professional Edition includes Talisma Email, Talisma Chat, Talisma Telephony and Talisma Knowledgebase/Web self-service. Competitively priced, the solutions were created to provide small and mid-sized organizations with the ability to offer improved levels of customer service regardless of whether there is one customer service agent or many working from a small office, a dedicated call center or remote locations. According to the company, Talisma Professional Edition delivers measurable return on investment within hours or days of implementation through increased customer interaction efficiency and effectiveness. As part of the solution, Talisma is offering complimentary initial and ongoing Web-based training courses, helping ensure both a rapid implementation and ongoing success.

Talisma Professional Edition communication channels can be delivered as on-demand or onsite applications and are designed to stand alone or work effectively together as an integrated suite. Channels and users can be added as needed. Also available as a host-to-own, Talisma Professional Edition can seamlessly transition from an on-demand to onsite solution as a company's Internet technology needs change.

<http://www.talisma.com>



eStara Launches "Click-to-Chat" Application

eStara, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of multichannel communications solutions, has announced the launch of its real-time text chat solution. The new product was designed to enable eStara customers to offer Click-to-Chat service in addition to eStara's flagship Click-to-Call solution, or as a stand-alone product. The Click-to-Call and Click-to-Chat solutions enable online shoppers to directly communicate with a human customer service representative at the click of a button. Analyst research shows that enriching e-commerce with these solutions reduces shopping cart abandonment, increases transaction conversion rates and boosts revenue.

Using its patent-pending cross-channel data passing technology, both eStara's Click-to-Call and Click-to-Chat solutions can help ensure continuity of experience for online shoppers as they transition from the Web to a voice or text chat conversation. Cross-channel data passing creates a seamless experience by transferring information about the customer and the context of his or her online session directly to the customer service representative (CSR) at the time of the call or chat initiation. The CSR's software can be configured to display this information directly on the agent's desktop screen, or it can use the incoming data values to trigger lookups into the company's own databases to retrieve related details (customer records, purchase history, billing information, etc.).

<http://www.estara.com>



Eloqua To Offer Conversion Suite Winter 2006 Release

Automated demand-generation software provider **Eloqua Corporation** ([news - alert](#)) recently announced the launch of Eloqua Conversion Suite Winter 2006. The latest version of the company's integrated demand-generation platform offers marketers new capabilities and feature improvements to help drive demand and cultivate the prospect information needed for closing a sale. Eloqua Conversion Suite is an on-demand solution that automates and integrates workflow across the key sales and marketing functions of e-mail, direct mail, Web site analytics, campaign analytics and sales force automation to improve the quality and quantity of sales leads, eliminate waste and accelerate the entire selling process.

Integration on Demand is a new integration engine that provides both technical and functional connections via the Web to a range of CRM applications and other third-party business applications. Eloqua's integration architecture minimizes marketing's reliance on IT, putting them in control of data resources and extending their visibility. According to the company, the innovation will power a number of packaged integrations to leading CRM systems that Eloqua will make available this year, an example of which is Eloqua's recent product announcements for salesforce.com's AppExchange.

<http://www.eloqua.com>

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Telrex Announces IP Call Recording For Covad's Hosted PBX Service

Telrex, ([news - alert](#)) a developer of call recording and monitoring software for small and medium-sized businesses using IP-PBXs or hosted PBX services, and Covad Communications, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of integrated voice and data services, have jointly announced the availability of CallRex call recording with Covad's vPBX voice services.

CallRex brings a full-featured, software-only IP-based call recording solution to Covad's vPBX service. With CallRex, Covad has said it can now attract customers that require call recording for training purposes, dispute resolution or regulatory compliance.

<http://www.telrex.com> and <http://www.covad.com>

LSSi's National Database Named "Most Accurate"

For the fourth year running, The Paisley Group has determined that LSSi's ([news - alert](#)) national database of "telco-fresh" telephone listings is the most accurate in the industry. The Paisley Group is the telephony industry's leading measurer of directory assistance accuracy, customer fulfillment and customer care. The Paisley studies provide industry analysts with the clearest picture of the true accuracy and completeness of directory assistance databases. Their 2005 study compared the LSSi U.S. database with those of other NDA database suppliers. The 2005 study was designed to test database accuracy under the actual conditions faced by directory assistance operators. It was based on 600 real directory-assistance calls and was not limited to standard searches, but also included requests for hard-to-find listings, new listings, listings that had been disconnected, listings that were requested out of order and listings with incomplete details. Once again, LSSi's accuracy score exceeded 99 percent (study margin of error ± 0.7 percent).

For carriers and other DA providers, the accuracy of listing data is a core concern. With roughly six billion calls being made to directory assistance each year, an error rate of just two percent produces 120 million misses, increasing provider operating costs and eroding caller satisfaction.

<http://www.lssi.net>

TCIM Services Names EVP/COO

J. Bryan Gross, a long-time senior executive in the teleservices industry, has been named the new Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of TCIM Services ([news - alert](#)) of Wilmington, Delaware, the industry's first ISO 9002-certified firm and the industry's largest woman-owned firm.

"We're excited that Bryan has chosen to join us at TCIM," said Linda C. Drake, chairman and founder of TCIM Services, a privately-held firm. "The people of TCIM Services have distinguished themselves in our growth since our founding. We are now ready to move our organization to the next level."

With over 18 years at the executive level in the contact center industry, Gross joins TCIM Services from ACS, a \$5 billion publicly held provider of outsourced business process and technology outsourcing, where he had profit and loss responsibility for \$250 million in revenue including operations and relationships in four countries on three continents. He has also held executive positions at Sprint, MCI and Teletch.

<http://www.tcim.com>

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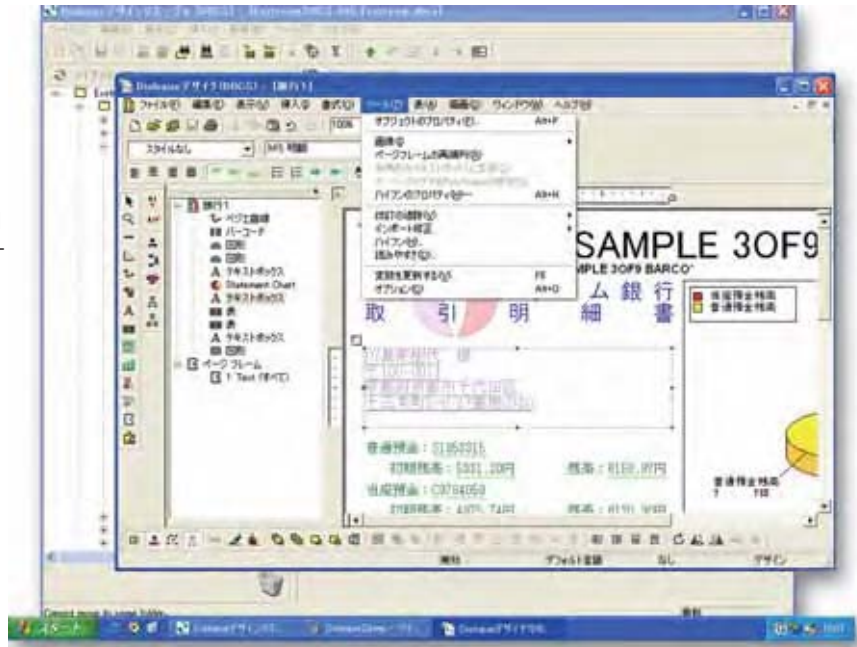
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Exstream Launches Dialogue In Japanese

Exstream Software, Inc. ([news - alert](#)) has announced the general availability of Dialogue in Japanese. Dialogue is the company's enterprise software designed to allow companies to create and manage higher quality, fully personalized communications of all types for delivery through high-volume print/mail, real-time and Web-based channels. Exstream first announced the availability of its double-byte character set (DBCS) version of Dialogue to support Asian business requirements in April 2002 (version 3.0). Since then, Exstream has been active in the Japanese market, announcing a formal partnership in November 2004 with **Kanematsu Electronics Ltd. (KEL)** in Tokyo to market Dialogue in Japan. The localization of Dialogue for Japan — meaning the user interface has been adapted to its language, standards and cultural norms — includes expanded DBCS functionality and meets specific needs requested by Japanese organizations.

<http://www.exstream.com>



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The New Rules Of Compliance: Combining Performance Management And Compliance To Solve The Regulatory Puzzle, Simplify Management And Reduce Costs

The word "compliance" can make any business cringe, especially public companies and contact centers in teleservices, healthcare, banking, insurance and other regulated industries. And it's no wonder. Governing agencies seem to issue new regulations every day, from every direction: FCC telemarketing rules, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, HIPPA, GBLA requirements, etc. Most of these regulations are ambiguous and come with little regulatory guidance on how to define them in a clear and consistent manner.

Many companies, therefore, must interpret guidelines on their own and attempt to manage compliance issues accordingly, which may or may not keep them in the good graces of the regulators. Alternatively, some companies engage consultants and pay expensive fees upfront to avoid exorbitant fines for non-compliance later. As Richard Gincel writes in "The Awful Truth About Compliance" (Infoworld, Dec. 8, 2005), "According to AMR Research, U.S. public companies will spend \$6 billion

complying with Sarbanes-Oxley this fiscal year [2006], which will pay for staffing to consultant fees to mail archiving software."

With regards to a contact center environment that includes formal as well as informal agents, the aspects of performance management and compliance management are actually quite similar.

But trying to decipher and comply with complex guidelines is only one piece of the regulatory puzzle. Adding to the problem for thousands of organizations are disparate data systems, interaction systems and processes that not only make compliance programs difficult to manage, but drive up the already staggering costs of meeting regulatory requirements. Case in point? One compliance vendor recently pointed out that many of the companies

they serve now spend as much as 50 percent of their annual IT budget on addressing regulatory issues, in particular Sarbanes-Oxley Section 404, which requires a business's compliance processes to produce certifiably correct data.

That's the bad news for many businesses, since compliance will remain a daunting task for the foreseeable future. Yet there's also good news to achieving compliance success. By taking some practical, straightforward measures to combine compliance processes with performance management — and to converge data systems and interaction systems — regulated companies can gain tighter control of their compliance programs and reduce program costs significantly at the same time.

Performance Versus Compliance: Measuring The Similarities

With regards to a contact center environment that includes formal as well as informal agents, the aspects of performance management and compliance management are actually quite similar. As we've done in the comparison table here, the first step toward merging the two management processes is to identify the key points of each and gauge how they match up. Every point you associate on both sides of the ledger gives your organization a stronger framework for implementing a new compliance program or improving an existing one.

Performance Management	Compliance Management
Documented standards/policies for performance requirements	Documented standards/policies for compliance program(s)
Contact center manager in charge of quality and performance adherence	Executive-level manager in charge of compliance review and adherence
Frequent staffing changes (supervisors, agents, business users) require ongoing orientation and training programs	Frequent staffing changes (management and staff) require ongoing compliance training program
Varying skill levels affect performance reviews and consequences	Varying skill levels affect compliance reviews and consequences
Control mechanisms to improve performance that doesn't meet requirements	Control mechanisms to manage non-compliance issues internally
Security and encryption to avoid tampering	Security and encryption to avoid tampering
Management audits to ensure the integrity of performance measurement systems	Management audits to ensure the integrity of compliance program, per department
Multichannel customer contacts and multimedia interaction management	Multichannel customer contacts and multimedia interaction management; managing resulting data
Storage of multimedia recordings to measure performance on all media types	Storage of multimedia recordings to ensure compliance on all media types
Role-based access to performance data for review	Role-based access to compliance data for review
Supervisor-agent scorecard system to report performance and manage historical background data	Supervisor-agent scorecard system to report compliance and non-conformance issues

Interpret Regulations

Once you've determined a program framework for performance-compliance management, the next step is to designate staff to interpret and understand the regulations with which your business must comply. Consultants can help unravel complex regulatory guidelines to start, and can also refine your program framework as needed, although their service fees can add up quickly if used on a continuous basis.

Remember, too, that the various knowledge levels of agents and associated personnel in a contact center further lend themselves to regulatory issues. Because contact centers historically have a higher rate of turnover than most businesses, regularly scheduled training programs for new and existing employees alike can lead to a more consistent understanding of compliance among all employees.

Integrate Compliance-Performance Programs Into Your Business Processes

Given the similarities of compliance and performance, and to make both management processes more fail-safe and cost-effective, consider building in process control points along with departmental audit procedures, security and ongoing training programs to ensure adherence to those control points. Doing so will also make it easier to integrate all performance-compliance processes within your everyday business processes, based on the following program elements for your staff and the data and interaction systems they use.

Program elements impacting staff

- Compliance implementation team with direct lines to management to approve all policies;
- Clearly defined criteria for a successful compliance/performance management program;
- Clear policies for compliance and performance per department, such as telemarketing, sales, customer service, etc.;
- Documented compliance criteria and expectations for agents and supervisors, communicated up-front;
- Documented workflow and control points throughout the compliance process;

- Consistent compliance and performance "scripts" or response management tools for agents and other affected users, such as business users who serve as informal agents;
- Agent-supervisor training program for compliance quality and performance issues; and
- Departmental auditing program.

Program elements impacting systems

- Implement an integrated rules engine that handles all media types to manage inbound as well as outbound customer phone calls, e-mails, Web chats, faxes and other interaction types;
- Capture all interaction media types and associated customer identifiers, both for performance and compliance review;
- Offer real-time tools such as agent scripting, screen pops, etc. to meet compliance and performance criteria;
- Provide response management assistance for all media types, not just phone calls;

- Incorporate security provisions such as encryption to ensure the integrity of archived information;
- Use score card-based agent/user scoring and reports to understand compliance issues from a staffing perspective; and
- Update performance/compliance workflows in conjunction with the rules engine on a continuous basis: the ability to respond to updated regulations or interpretations in a timely manner is always critical.

Reassess Your Data Systems And Interaction Systems

The analysts at Gartner say it best in their report on Client Issues 2005 (Mar. 29, 2005): How to Achieve Regulatory Compliance and ERM. "Disparate and complex systems provide contextual data (from media such as e-mail, instant messaging, text documents and graphics) in every firm. The lack of rules and procedures to consistently capture and manage content in such media is a source of regulatory risk. The disciplines of records management, ECM and workflow are directly relevant."





Call hindsight 20-20, but many organizations unknowingly amplified their regulatory risk by building out data systems and interaction systems years ago when compliance wasn't an issue. Fortunately, multi-channel contact management systems like the Customer Interaction Center (CIC) from Interactive Intelligence make it possible to manage multimedia interactions as well as data from a single communications platform and "rules engine" — which reduces the risk of non-compliance for the inbound/outbound multichannel environment by replacing traditionally disparate systems. For compliance insurance plus enhanced performance, the CIC system offers integrated features including rules-based recording, agent scoring, screen pop, desktop screen capture, real-time supervisory monitoring, interaction tracking, and database and knowledgebase integrations for comprehensive performance-compliance management.

The Benefits Of Combined Performance-Compliance Management

In addition to reducing costs by combining programs and eliminating the ongoing need for expensive consultants, joint performance-compliance management in the contact center allows a single team to monitor performance criteria and oversee compliance issues simultaneously. Compliance therefore is "built in" both to the business process and agent performance review, along with consequences.

Advanced event-by-event monitoring, tracking and scoring features such as those in the CIC contact center application suite "rules engine" also reduce non-compliance incidents, leading to hard dollar cost savings from improved compliance tracking and auditing results, and due to associated savings over disconnected data and interaction systems.

Joseph A. Staples is Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing for Interactive Intelligence Inc., a global developer of software for contact centers and the enterprise since 1994. The application suites from Interactive Intelligence have long provided out-of-the-box functionality for performance as well as compliance management, and today remain proven solutions for regulated organizations worldwide. Contact Interactive Intelligence at 317-872-3000 voice and fax, or visit <http://www.inin.com>. (news - alert)

The Neverending Story Of The Consequences Of Failing To Self-Regulate

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

Most fables start like this: "Once upon a time..." Being unwilling to break with tradition, I'll continue it. Once upon a time, there was a U.S. teleservices industry with little to no competition, few regulations and a lot of room to grow. Outbound, done well, was lucrative and the companies that were successful valued their customers and respected their limits. Enter the people who saw outbound as a "get rich quick" scheme, and outbound was branded with a scarlet "A" ...for annoying.

"Perhaps we should talk about self-regulating," said the legitimate players, nervous that bad outbound habits would begin to scare away customers. "Nah," said many people in the industry. "That would put a kink in our business processes, and we're too busy for that."

As in most fables, the denouement is predictable. A lack of self-regulation led to an escalation of abuses by many outbound players, and the entire industry suddenly found that the Regulatory Fairy had flown in their windows overnight in the shape of the FCC and the FTC. Instead of a set of stern but practicable self-regulatory processes that they might have drafted on their own and been able to live with, what the industry got was a draconian rulebook with which many companies are still struggling to comply today.

Fast-forward a few years later, and many companies are still happily deceiving themselves. "Well, outbound may be regulated, but there's still inbound, Web media and self-service," they say. "No one will ever regulate those!" These companies haven't been paying attention. There are states with pending legislation requiring a caller who encounters an IVR to be able to zero out to an operator immediately, for example.

If your organization has been dragging its feet on implementing quality control and compliance systems in its call center, be assured that you're setting yourself up to be involuntarily put through the wash and dry cycle yet again.

As all fables have a moral at the end, let it be this...it's the companies that manage their processes for quality control and compliance because they want to, rather than because they have to, that get to run away with the beautiful princess and live happily ever after.

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



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⇒ Visit UCN at booth 121 at the HDI Annual Conference & Expo, March 20 – 21 in Nashville.

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Four Pitfalls To Avoid When Choosing CRM Software

What is customer relationship management software, exactly? The answer to that question is different depending on whom you ask. For many companies, CRM equals sales force automation (SFA). Others use the term CRM to describe customer support management, field service, contact center, or marketing automation. Confusion or miscommunication on this important question can result in companies making bad decisions that can cost tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars and waste months, if not years, of time. Choosing the right system can dramatically improve the productivity of your team and increase customer satisfaction. But the wrong system can create chaos and frustration in addition to burning through a lot of cash — only to put your organization in a worse situation than where you started. The following highlights some of the more common mistakes companies make when choosing a CRM system, and how to avoid them.

Beware Of Trojan Horses

For companies that have deployed an ERP system, one of the biggest issues is deciding whether to choose the CRM module bundled with their ERP software, or to purchase an independent package. For many companies, choosing the bundled CRM will be an excellent solution that enables them to save a significant amount of money. For others, it will be a kind of Trojan horse that ends up costing them money for customization, integration and implementation costs. How can your company make the right choice?

The best and only way to determine whether a bundled CRM solution is a good fit is to measure features and functionality against your CRM needs. Do you need a basic contact center system that enables your team to open, log and close calls? Do you need a system that can manage your field service business, and provide a complete sales force automation solu-

tion, or one that offers extensive consumer support or marketing automation capabilities? CRM is a big space, and it's not the main focus of some ERP software developers. If the bundled CRM solution is missing features that are important to your business, your company might be better off investing in a solution that meets your needs out of the box.

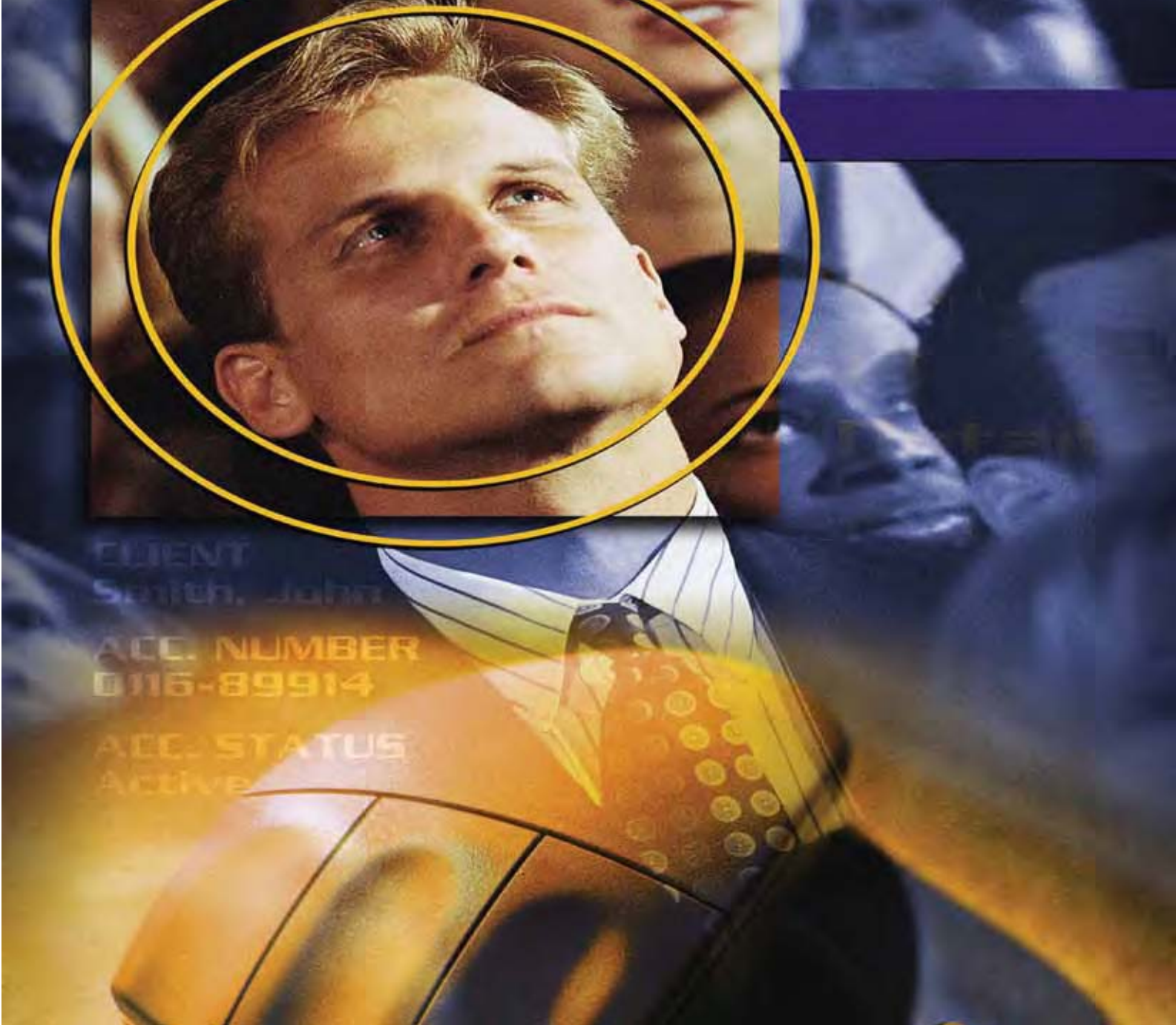
A positive aspect of a bundled ERP-CRM solution is that both packages share one common customer database, and that integration can be valuable. But integration between independent CRM and ERP systems can be achieved as well. A CRM system with well-designed application programming interfaces (APIs) is usually capable of sharing data with any enterprise system.

By Ron Wegmann
Vertical Solutions

Understand The True Costs Of Customization

No matter if your company chooses a bundled or independent CRM solution, it's rare to find a product that meets 100 percent of your needs. Almost every product will require some customization, but it's important to determine how much customization you will need to meet your business needs. While one product may meet 80 percent of your needs out of the box, another one that meets fewer needs initially might be more attractive because it is customizable. The trick is to avoid falling into the trap of endless customizations — remember that you are buying a solution, not a toolkit.

In general, there are four levels of customization for any product. The first level involves developing simple rules such as report filters, escalation levels and other business rules that enable the system to act the way you want, and provide the information you



need. The second level is the ability to add or change the positioning and formatting of data elements on the screen, such as adding or moving the position of a box that highlights the product type. These levels represent the types of changes that CRM teams constantly make to their systems, and it's important to choose a system that enables you to perform these using internal staff. Paying a consultant every time you need to generate a new report or change a screen view is an expensive, time-consuming and frustrating experience.

The third level of customization involves scripting to drive process flow. For example, if action A occurs, the sys-

tem should perform activity B. These types of activities occur less frequently than the first two levels, but ideally can be managed by an internal team. Finally, the last level requires managing the application programming interface to enable integration with other systems. Again, a competent internal team should be allowed to manage this activity, but because it does not happen that frequently; relying on the vendor for this step will not be too costly over time.

How much will all of these customizations cost? It is not uncommon for professional services such as customization and integration to cost up to 10 times the initial product price,

making what seems like an inexpensive package very costly in the long run. Discover true costs by calling existing customers to find out what percent of their overall costs was devoted to the product price, and what percent to other professional services. A one-to-one ratio is ideal.

Some packages and modules are designed to enable an internal IT team to do required modifications, but keep in mind that some require external consultants. This is particularly true of many of the CRM modules bundled with ERP systems, so it is important to gauge those costs upfront. Calculate the costs of professional services, customization and integration along with the

product price to calculate the total cost of ownership.

CRM Software Is Not A Magic Wand

After reviewing packages that have the right balance of features and customizability, it's easy to believe that the software has magical powers that will solve all internal process problems. A robust software package can streamline steps, eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies and turn a good CRM department into a great one. But, it can't do it on its own — it's important for companies to honestly assess their department's strengths and weaknesses and find a product that enhances the former and minimizes the latter.

Sometimes this decision is exacerbated when people outside of the CRM department make a product decision. In many cases, the technology users are

expected to accept the management decision. It's important to communicate the CRM department's true needs to all stakeholders on the buying team. Everyone must know the potential benefits of the software and its impact on the wellbeing of the company. While everyone should be optimistic, it's more important to be realistic. Understand your existing processes and how you'd like to improve them in the future so you can choose a product that helps you get to where you want to be.

Don't Overreach

In the product selection phase, it's easy to get carried away. Every feature and option looks crucial, and rosy deployment scenarios abound. CRM teams must work hard to keep their project grounded in reality.

In the product selection phase, it's easy to get carried away. Every feature and option looks crucial, and rosy deployment scenarios abound.

The first step is to create a realistic wish list of features. Beware of outdated or isolated exception options that can turn a simple process into a nightmare. The key to avoiding "scope creep" is to balance necessary business processes with desired customizations. Adding every feature known to man will turn your CRM project into a multiyear quest for the ultimate Holy

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Grail. Remember: the best technology solution will not deliver a single result until it is up and running. Implement CRM using the 90/180 rule. Implementation projects should be scoped to less than 90 days in length and the ROI should be recognized within the next 180 days.

This phenomenon is frequently extended to the deployment phase, as well. Too many companies fail when they overreach on their installation plans — the goal is to create a string of small wins that leads up to an overall project win at the end, and to communicate both the plan and the resulting progress to management along the way. The CRM group will not endear itself to management if it reports that it can deploy all aspects of the product across the entire company right away. Instead, plan in advance to

adopt a phased-in approach. This helps companies troubleshoot deployment issues on a small scale without bringing the whole department down. Focus on segmented components of the solution, discover which are most crucial, and roll them out one department at a time.

Beware of deployment schedules that sound too good to be true — they probably are. Again, the best plan is to speak with existing customers to determine actual deployment schedules, things that worked well and, even more important, things they would change if they could do it all over again. Learn from their experiences.

Many companies have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars and multiple years on CRM deployment projects, only to find they made a bad choice and must start over. Don't let this hap-

pen to you — make sure you calculate the true cost of the project, recognize the cost and time issues involved in ongoing customization, be realistic about what the product can do, and be practical when it's time to deploy. Together, these steps can add up to CRM success. **CIS**

Ron Wegmann, Sr. is CEO and President of Vertical Solutions (<http://www.vertsol.com>), (news - alert) a Cincinnati-based developer of IT Service Management and CRM software. Contact Ron at ron.wegmann@vertsol.com.

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® Magazine's

Twenty-First Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking

This is the twenty-first year *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine brings you its "Top 50" Teleservices Agency Ranking. In this issue, we're presenting the "Top 50" outbound portion of the ranking. (The inbound portion of the ranking will be highlighted in the April 2006 issue.) Since its inception in 1986, our "Top 50" ranking has been used as the benchmark for choosing large-capacity/sized teleservices agencies.

Ranking Basis

Since the basis of our ranking is company size, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* uses a measurable, *third-party-verifiable* aspect of teleservices to arrive at our list of the "Top 50" agencies: *the number of minutes each agency was billed* by each of its phone companies for telephone service for 12 months, encompassing November 2004 through October 2005. We have found this to be an accurate and reliable reflection of the amount of teleservices each agency does, and therefore, provides a true reflection of its size.

Qualification Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in this year's "Top 50," the agencies were required to answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes between November 2004 and October 2005. The questionnaire had to be verified with the signature of each agency's president/CEO. In addition, each agency had to submit a letter of verification from each of its telephone service providers certifying the number of minutes for which it billed the agency during the designated period. (Our sincere gratitude is extended to all the carriers for their thorough and expeditious provision of these data.)

Exceptions

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

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

Understanding The Listings

First, you'll notice that we have included a ranking of aggregate minutes, inbound and outbound, domestic and international, to provide readers with a picture of how the largest teleservices providers measure against one another on a global basis. This ranking follows the domestic and international outbound lists and is marked as Category C. Second, as you read through the list of outbound "Top 50" agencies, you will notice that we have provided a





The Top Five Global Teleservices Performers

1. SR. Teleperformance
2. ACS, Inc.
3. SITEL Corp.
4. ClientLogic
5. ICT Group, Inc.

numerical ranking of 1 through 36 (1 being the largest), but have not revealed the number of billable minutes used to arrive at this ordering. This was done out of respect for the confidential nature of this information to the many agencies included here that are privately held corporations. This year, only 36 companies met with our minimum criteria of billable minutes to be included in the outbound ranking.

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

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

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

CATEGORY A

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Millenium Teleservices LLC
(http://www.mmtel.com)</p> <p>2. ICT Group, Inc. † *
http://www.ictgroup.com</p> <p>3. Infocision Management Corp.
Ph: 330-668-1400;
Fx: 330-668-1401
http://www.infocision.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1982
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 500 hours
Type of calling:
B-to-B: 14%; B-to-C: 86%
Outbound: 84%; Inbound: 15%;
Interactive Inbound: 1%
Specialization: political, non-profit and religious fundraising, product/service sales and customer care, volunteer recruitment</p> <p>4. DialAmerica Marketing, Inc.
(http://www.dialamerica.com)</p> <p>5. Americall Group Inc. (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group) † *
http://www.americallgroup.com</p> <p>6. SITEL Corp. †
http://www.sitel.com</p> <p>7. GC Services Limited Partnership † *
http://www.gcserv.com</p> <p>8. Teleperformance USA (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group) †
http://www.teleperformanceusa.com</p> <p>9. APAC Customer Services, Inc. † *
http://www.apaccustomerservices.com</p> <p>10. TCIM Services, Inc. *
http://www.tcim.com</p> <p>11. ClientLogic † *
http://www.clientlogic.com</p> | <p>12. Epixtar †
http://www.epixtar.com</p> <p>13. NCO Group † *
http://www.ncogroup.com</p> <p>14. NOVO 1, Inc.
http://www.novo1.com</p> <p>15. Influent Inc. †
http://www.influentinc.com</p> <p>16. Teleservices Direct †
http://www.teleservicesdirect.com</p> <p>17. eTelecare Global Solutions † *
http://www.etelecare.com</p> <p>18. The Heritage Company, Inc.
http://www.theheritagecompany.com</p> <p>19. Charlton
http://www.tcgcorp.net</p> <p>20. Synergy Solutions, Inc. *
http://www.synergysolutionsinc.com</p> <p>21. 121 Direct Response (Tele-Response Center, Inc.) *
http://www.121directresponse.com</p> <p>22. Cross Country Automotive Services, Inc. †
http://www.crosscountry-auto.com</p> <p>23. ACS, Inc. † *
http://www.acs-inc.com</p> <p>24. Hamilton Contact Center Services
http://www.hamiltontm.com</p> <p>25. AnswerNet Network
http://www.answer.netnetwork.com</p> <p>26. Advanced Data-Comm, Inc.
Ph: 800-582-9501;
Fx: 800-829-9780
http://www.advanced-data.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1988</p> |
|---|--|

Size of projects accepted:
Minimum 200 hours
Type of calling:
B-to-B: 54%; B-to-C: 46%
Outbound: 69.1; Inbound: 30.9%
Specialization: customer service, sales, market research

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

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

29. Vision-X, Inc. *
<http://www.vxiusa.com>

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

31. Alta Resources *
<http://www.altaresources.com>

32. AFFINA, LLC *
<http://www.affina.com>

33. InPulse Response Group
<http://www.inpulseresponse.com>

34. Connexions
<http://www.connexions.com>

35. Telvista † *
<http://www.telvista.com>

36. InService America
<http://www.inserviceamerica.com>

CATEGORY B — INTERNATIONAL

1. SR. Teleperformance
Ph: +33 155764080;
Fx: +33 155764081
<http://www.srteleperformance.com>
Year began providing teleservices:
1978
Size of projects accepted:
Minimum varies
Type of calling:
B-to-B: 20%; B-to-C: 80%
Outbound: 31%; Inbound: 64%;

Interactive Inbound: 5%
Specialization: outsourced CRM services, debt collection, technical support

2. SITEL Corp.
<http://www.sitel.com>

3. NCO Group *
<http://www.ncogroup.com>

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

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

6. ClientLogic *
<http://www.clientlogic.com>

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

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

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

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

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

12. Telvista *
<http://www.telvista.com>

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

14. Americall Group Inc. (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group)
<http://www.americallgroup.com>

15. Ambergris Solutions *
<http://www.ambergrissolutions.com>

16. Voxdata *
<http://www.voxdata.com>

17. Epixtar
<http://www.epixtar.com>

18. ACS, Inc. *
<http://www.acs-inc.com>

19. Cross Country Automotive Services, Inc.
<http://www.crosscountry-auto.com>

20. Hispanic Teleservices Corp. *
<http://www.htc.to>

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

1. SR. Teleperformance
Ph: +33 155764080;
Fx: +33 155764081
<http://www.srteleperformance.com>
Year began providing teleservices:
1978
Size of projects accepted:
Minimum varies
Type of calling:
B-to-B: 20%; B-to-C: 80%
Outbound: 31%; Inbound: 64%;
Interactive Inbound: 5%
Specialization: outsourced CRM services, debt collection, technical support

2. ACS, Inc. *
<http://www.acs-inc.com>

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

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

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

6. NCO Group *
<http://www.ncogroup.com>

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



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|--|--|---|
| 8. eTelecare Global Solutions *
http://www.etelecare.com | 20. Hispanic Teleservices Corp. *
http://www.htc.to | 37. Alta Resources *
http://www.altaresources.com |
| 9. APAC Customer Services, Inc. *
http://www.apaccustomerservices.com | 21. Cross Country Automotive Services
http://www.crosscountry-auto.com | 38. 121 Direct Response (Tele-Response Center, Inc.) *
http://www.121directresponse.com |
| 10. GC Services Limited Partnership *
http://www.gcserv.com | 22. AFFINA, LLC *
http://www.affina.com | 39. AnswerNet Network
http://www.answernetnetwork.com |
| 11. Telvista
http://www.telvista.com | 23. Influent, Inc.
http://www.influentinc.com | 40. Alert Communications *
http://www.alertcom.com |
| 12. DialAmerica Marketing Inc.
http://www.dialamerica.com | 24. Epixtar
http://www.epixtar.com | 41. XO Interactive *
http://www.xo.com |
| 13. InfoCision Management Corp.
Ph: 330-668-1400;
Fx: 330-668-1401
http://www.infocision.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1982
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 500 hours
Type of calling: B-to-B: 14%; B-to-C: 86%
Outbound: 84%; Inbound: 15%; Interactive Inbound: 1%
Specialization: political, non-profit and religious fundraising, product/service sales and customer care, volunteer recruitment | 25. MCCI (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group)
http://www.mcci.ca | 42. Ambergris Solutions *
http://www.ambergrissolutions.com |
| 14. Millenium Teleservices
http://www.mmtel.com | 26. The Connection *
http://www.the-connection.com | 43. Advanced Data-Comm, Inc.
Ph: 800-582-9501; Fx: 800-829-9780
http://www.advanced-data.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1988
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 200 hours
Type of calling: B-to-B: 54%; B-to-C: 46%
Outbound: 69.1; Inbound: 30.9%
Specialization: customer service, sales, market research |
| 15. Americall Group Inc. (part of the SR. Teleperformance Group)
http://www.americallgroup.com | 27. Archway Marketing Services
http://www.archway.com | 44. InService America
http://www.inserviceamerica.com |
| 16. Center Partners *
http://www.centerpartners.com | 28. NOVO 1
http://www.novo1.com | 45. Voxdata *
http://www.voxdata.com |
| 17. TCIM Services, Inc. *
http://www.tcim.com | 29. Teleservices Direct
http://www.teleservicesdirect.com | 46. Connexions
http://www.connexions.com |
| 18. Vision-X Inc. *
http://www.vxiusa.com | 30. Charlton
http://www.tcgcorp.net | 47. Global Response *
http://www.globalresponse.com |
| 19. PCCW Contact Center Business *
http://www.pccw.com/contact_center | 31. Telerx
http://www.telerx.com | 48. O'Curran Teleservices
http://www.ocurance.com |
| | 32. Microdyne Outsourcing Inc. *
http://www.microdyne.com | 49. Greene & Associates, Inc.
http://www.greeneassoc.com |
| | 33. Synergy Solutions, Inc. *
http://www.synergysolutionsinc.com | 50. 24-7 InTouch Inc.
http://www.24-7intouch.com |
| | 34. The Heritage Company, Inc.
http://www.theheritagecompany.com | |
| | 35. InPulse Response Group
http://www.inpulseresponse.com | |
| | 36. Hamilton Contact Center Services
http://www.hamiltontm.com | |

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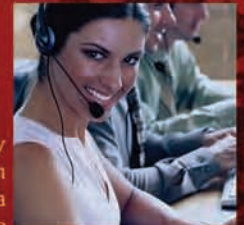
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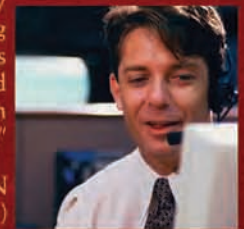
2005 / 2006

fDi Magazine, Financial Times



"HDN" has been very impressed with the telecom infrastructure that Guatemala has. In addition, the abundance of talented labor and extremely competitive wages are exceeding our expectations. HDN is looking forward to continued success and substantial growth in Guatemala."

Michael J. Riek, President, HDN
(Help Desk Now)



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Hiring and Training For The Call Center:

Developing The “Universal Agent” And Beyond

If you asked most CEOs what the most important aspect of a call center is, you will likely get a quick response: “low cost.” In today’s competitive landscape, however, smart executives are beginning to reevaluate their call centers and turn them into well-oiled, revenue-generating machines. A call center that adds business value in addition to retaining a low cost profile gives a business a tremendous advantage over its competitors.

However, an often overlooked function of a call center is managing the customer experience so it is consistent with the company’s brand. What customers experience during their transactions with call center agents solidifies their overall impressions of the company. Transforming a call center from a cost-cutting afterthought to a viable, brand-carrying, profit-generating division of the business begins by establishing effective hiring processes and training programs.

Establishing A Strategy

As with most business processes, the first step in the agent hiring process must be to establish goals for the call center itself. A company can hire call center agents and managers only after developing a comprehensive strategy that clearly defines objectives. Executives need to define what the call center’s top priorities should be in order to hire employees who are best suited to execute this strategy.

In-depth research, advancements in call center technology and the emergence of niche outsourcing companies

have shed new light on the capabilities of the contact center. If staffed and managed properly, the contact center can be an invaluable asset to the business. Companies should thoroughly examine the possible added benefits of the call center in order to set goals that match its strategy. Consultants can help organizations determine how best the call center can help drive marketing, sales and product development initiatives.

The key is to recognize the links between a company’s branding strategy, call center goals and resulting training program. From analysis and understanding of these areas and how they affect each other, an accurate agent profile can be built. Many companies fail to recognize, for example, that the hiring profile they created does not attract candidates with the requisite skills to start training. This puts the trainers at a disadvantage, forcing them to either expand training — which increases costs — or produce

By Ted Nardin
ClientLogic



agents with low confidence and skill, which in turn reduces customer loyalty and drives up costs through poor work and a high turnover rate. Similarly, some companies hire agents qualified beyond the requisite skills for entering training. Without good communication between the hiring and training teams, the agents end up bored, unchallenged and often stay with those companies for a shorter duration.

Regardless of the strategy, however, there are many benefits a call center can provide that require hiring talented, highly motivated agents. Some of these value-adds include increased first-contact resolution, revenue generation through cross-selling and upselling, marketing insight through agent focus groups and customer loyalty created by



agents who are trained to establish an emotional bond with customers.

Once a company establishes goals for its call centers, it can begin the process of hiring agents who will attain and exceed these goals.

Attitude Versus Aptitude

After call center goals are established, companies can put together a profile of the type of agent necessary to meet these objectives. A common mistake that organizations make is to focus this profile on aptitude without considering attitude. While the ability to learn new skills is absolutely necessary to becoming an effective agent, only employees who possess the drive to succeed will be able to effectively execute call center goals.

While this may seem like common sense, consider that many organizations struggle with their customer service efforts. One of the reasons is because without the right positive attitude, even the most skilled agents will be unable — and unwilling — to effectively help the call center add business value. They will simply go through the proverbial motions, waiting for their next paycheck. Companies must implement tactics to evaluate candidates' attitudes and behavior patterns in order to breed an environment of success.

Developing the right blend of attitude and ability can begin well before the hiring process even starts. Companies can work with local colleges, for example, to offer free technical training and other classes. Students

who score high on their certification exams could then be granted interviews for call center positions. Similarly, businesses can initiate “job shadowing” programs at their call centers. Local students can observe first-hand what it takes to be a successful agent.

Unfortunately, managers are sometimes fooled during the hiring process by candidates who appear to have the “right stuff.” Conducting standard interviews or relying heavily on skills testing often results in selecting agents who put on a good show, but are only looking for a quick job rather than a long-term opportunity. There are methods that managers can implement to reduce hiring error.

For example, during the hiring process, incorporating detailed behav-

ioral questionnaires and conducting behavioral interviews are ways managers can evaluate a candidate's strengths beyond what is printed on a resume. Conducting an interview by phone in addition to in person is also beneficial in determining whether a candidate's positive attitude is reflected during a phone call.

Another example is requiring candidates to return to the call center multiple times during the hiring process. By doing so, managers can determine a candidate's desire to be employed by the company. It is important to keep in mind, though, that too many visits will likely frustrate a candidate. Many top agents are often single parents or have other jobs, so it is important to respect their busy lives during the hiring process.

Using a combination of skills tests, behavioral interviews and realistic job previews yields the best results. Using all three approaches provides an opportunity for managers to triangulate results and gain a 360-degree view of the candidate. This will help in selecting agents with enthusiasm and skill. More importantly, these methods should help call centers find agents who are driven by long-term success, which is important as training costs continue to escalate.

Creating The "Universal Agent"

After candidates who possess the proper mix of aptitude and attitude are hired, companies can begin training them to become "universal agents." The universal agent is one who can perform multiple tasks. Agents who can take on several duties — from customer care to technical support to sales — are a valuable resource to the call center, both in terms of reducing costs and adding business value.

As desirable as the universal agent is to a company, the idea that one person can address all of a caller's needs is even more important to the consumer. If one agent can fix a problem with a bill and then offer technical support, the caller

does not have to deal with the frustrations associated with being put on hold and transferred to various agents. Not only does this improve the customer's experience, but it can lower costs by eliminating multiple queuing problems and increasing agent utilization.

In order to ensure that its agents can effectively satisfy all a caller's needs, a company must implement effective training programs. Developing and training effective universal agents takes time, dedication and a clear process. It is important that training focus on one technique at a time so that agents become "experts" in one area before trying to learn another. Satisfying customers and attracting their loyalty is a long, slow process, but losing a customer takes no time at all. Therefore, it is important that agents are fully prepared to handle multiple concerns before they are asked to field calls.

For example, one way to employ universal agents is in selling, cross-selling and upselling. Embedded in nearly every customer service or technical support call is an opportunity to generate revenue by selling additional products or services while solving the customer's issue. Studies have shown that when an agent solves a customer's problem quickly and also successfully makes a sale, satisfaction increases significantly over those customers who had their problem resolved but were not sold additional items. These studies conclude that a properly trained agent is viewed by the customer as an expert and that by being able to get an expert's advice, the customer was able to make the correct purchase with no further effort.

The ability to cultivate opportunities and bring a sale to fruition should be an integral part of the agent training process. Customer service representatives who can recognize and execute opportunities to generate revenue are a valuable asset to the business, and the agent training program must reflect this.

Satisfying customers and attracting their loyalty is a long, slow process, but losing a customer takes no time at all.

Because the skills required to effectively manage universal agent skills — selling in particular — are quite different from those necessary for navigating through a technical support call, companies typically hire and train separate agents for customer service and technical support. However, it is often beneficial if a customer care agent can also help a caller with a support issue. Customers who call to activate a mobile phone account, for example, are likely to also have questions about their phone's functionality. If one agent can satisfy all of a customer's concerns, the potential impact on that customer's satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty is tremendous.

Managing For The Future

Agent churn has traditionally been one of the largest obstacles facing the contact center. Turnover is a concern particularly when utilizing the universal agent approach since training time is elongated, and therefore the cost is much higher. The nature of the business dictates that, at least to some degree, turnover will always exist. However, companies can implement processes to reduce turnover by training agents with a career path in mind. One way to accomplish this is to start training agents for management positions before there are actually positions available.

The management training process, much like developing the universal agent, is deliberate and involves a com-



mitment from both the company and the trainee. Companies must develop a management assessment process to identify management-caliber talent — inside or outside the company — to clearly define candidates to ensure that the investment is mutually beneficial. Too often, call centers pick the “best” agents, promote them and expect results right away. Companies can ensure a higher rate of success by properly training agents for management positions — for example, by working them into assistant manager or coaching positions — before officially promoting them.

When developing and instituting these processes, it is important to illustrate to agents exactly how they can achieve management positions. For example, companies can provide documentation that includes a detailed timeframe of how the management training process works. This timeline lets agents know exactly who they will be working with, what they will be doing and what is required to move on to the next phase of training. Clearly illustrating the path to attaining a management position bolsters confidence, increases morale and motivates agents to succeed.

As industries become more competitive and budgets are stretched thin, the call center is evolving from being the lowest rung on the corporate ladder to a revenue-generating, viable part of the business. Smart companies realize that call centers can add tremendous business value in addition to simply lowering customer service costs. Agents speak with customers on a daily basis, and therefore possess an incredible wealth of information that is valuable to departments throughout the business — from product development to sales to marketing. Putting the right people in place to harness this information is critical, and companies should evaluate their agent and management hiring and training processes to ensure that the call center shares and effectively executes the corporate values. **CS**

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Providing The Ultimate Customer Care: The Solution Recipe for Success — Multi-Blending

All companies like to offer their customers personalized service, particularly when it comes to answering inbound calls. Every customer interaction — from the first call to the last call — deserves the highest quality customer care to maintain complete satisfaction. Despite a relentless commitment to high-quality customer care, many companies still provide customer service in the old-fashioned single-solution way: in-house contact centers.

Just as individual callers must be handled differently depending on their specific needs, West Corporation believes that every customer service and customer care application is also unique and should be customized with a blended solution that meets both the budget and quality expectations. And, it's

important to concentrate on not only the applications themselves, but also how they're seamlessly managed.

The Recipe For A Multi-Blended Solution

Creating the right blended solution is like an ever-changing recipe with the same outcome — the highest quality service with the greatest value. It's important to remember that the business objectives of each individual call center require different levels of solutions and applications to reach perfection.

With a provider like West, companies can have a variety of customer contact options that can be blended in a multitude of ways. Everything from domestic, near-shore and

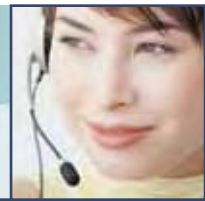
offshore agents to a menu of automated solutions can provide greater flexibility. In addition to managed solutions, companies that would like to benefit from West's in-house infrastructures yet still manage their own program can do so with West's hosted platform.

The Benefits Of An Outsourced Multi-Blended Solution

Superior quality control. A multi-blended solution from an outsourced provider allows customers to receive the best possible customer service. After a thorough analysis of the existing call demands, expectations and infrastructure, West collaborates with key personnel to plan and implement a seamless, customer-centric solution.

Flexibility and scalability. An outsourced multi-blended solution can give call centers the flexibility and scalability they need to meet customer demands, improve quality, maintain call spikes and provide greater cost control. Outsourced providers like West have the capacity, technology and experience to adapt to quick adjustments and large-scale requirements as a company's needs and objectives change.





Cost control. Combining a variety of solutions provides many cost options from which to choose since there are different pricing structures for each option. With West, companies can combine near-shore

Multi-Blended Solution Benefits:

1. Superior Quality Control
2. Flexibility & Scalability
3. Cost Control
4. Redundancy & Continuity

or offshore agents with at-home agents for those companies that want to retain as much of the service domestically as they can within their allotted budget. Additionally, layered options of voice self-service components can be blended to help reduce costs and improve customer service.

Creating the right blended solution is like an ever-changing recipe with the same outcome — the highest quality service with the greatest value. It's important to remember that the business objectives of each individual call center require different levels of solutions and applications to reach perfection.

Redundancy and continuity. In addition to standard backup systems, diversifying applications gives companies additional protection in the event of a natural disaster or

power outage. Should any one location be unavailable due to unforeseen service interruptions, West's Virtual ACD automatically routes calls to other available sites or remote agents. West's infrastructure is fully redundant with five data centers located across the U.S., all monitored by a state-of-the-art network operations center staffed 24/7/365, not to mention the thousands of at-home contracted agents on standby to begin taking calls.

For example, West provides its clients with an ideal recipe of quality and value through multi-blended solutions utilizing domestic, near-shore and offshore contact centers along with home agents and the latest in voice self-service technology. West has 20 years of experience in developing the training, scripting and staffing/scheduling tools, as well as the technological expertise and redundant infrastructure to make large customer care programs run smoothly.

How To Establish A Multi-Blended Solution

In most cases, obtaining a true multi-blended solution means looking beyond your existing in-house contact center. When selecting external providers, it's important to consider the vendor's history, product offering, reputation in the industry, financial stability and the quality of its client referrals.

It's also important to remember that it's not only the technology and software infra-

structure that matter, it's the maintenance, consulting and scripting that ultimately make the technology work best in your environment. This is where an outsourced provider can provide the most value over the long term.

Finding a reputable provider with the ability to meet your needs and design a solution that meets business objectives by developing the right recipe of live agents (at-home or location-based, offshore, near-shore or domestic) and interactive (voice, DTMF, VXML, etc.) applications is important for the highest quality multi-blended environment.

West's multi-blended solutions are customized to meet the changing needs of our dynamic corporate clients. Using robust technological capabilities developed and refined over the past two decades, West can provide its clients with up-to-the minute reports that are tied to benchmarks selected by the client.

Multi-blended solutions are changing the future of customer contact centers and are becoming the most efficient and cost-effective way for today's companies to make sure customers and prospects receive the type of outstanding service they expect.

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Looking Beyond The Call Center:

Preventing Erosion In Your Customer Base And Profits

Today's competitive business environment has driven the need for higher levels of service quality. Even with huge leaps in service technologies, companies struggle to meet customer expectations while reducing contact center costs.

For every service contact that a company receives from a customer, there are five to ten other customers who experience the same problem without making contact, according to a report by research firm TARP, "Understand Customer Behavior and Complaints."

These *silently dissatisfied* customers are a huge and hidden risk to your business. While they do not bother to seek assistance or to complain (to you), studies have shown that these *silently dissatisfied* customers are far more likely to stop doing business with you, and to communicate their dissatisfaction to others through "word-of-mouth" complaints.

The best way to address silently dissatisfied customers is to understand why customers call in the first place. By identifying the root causes of customer contacts, you can pinpoint the operational improvements that are needed to eliminate service issues that lead to dissatisfaction and churn.

Large service organizations with outsourced contact center operations experience additional challenges when working to improve operational performance. To serve their customers most effectively, these enterprises must solve complex process issues before being able to perform the level of analysis required to identify operational improvements. Process issues include:

- Integrating customer data with other organizational data;
- Consolidating customer information;
- Analyzing the overall customer contact database; and
- Identifying and eliminating the root causes of the most expensive customer problems.

Today, there are technologies that overcome the complexities of integrating multiple disparate data sources, aligning back-office and contact center processes, and generating insightful and actionable service operations metrics.

These solutions for operational performance management (OPM) are necessary to ensure that companies continue to improve the customer experience, both for vocal customers and for the silent majority.

The Challenge Of Serving The Silently Dissatisfied

Many companies believe that investing in customer center performance management alone will eliminate customer dissatisfaction. When customer service representatives are well trained, customer satisfaction and retention are expected to increase. Companies spend billions of dollars every year to improve

their contact center quality and self-service options.

While these are valuable investments, they do not address the source of the issues that created dissatisfied customers in the first place — namely, performance inefficiencies of back-office operations. These include:

- Incorrect or cumbersome customer setup processes;
- Billing statement errors or confusion; and
- Late and incorrect provider payments.

For the vocal dissatisfied customers who reach out for support, customer service representatives may be able to "recover" a customer's good opinion by politely and empathetically apologizing for the problem, giving refunds or providing another quick fix. This is an expensive way to deliver quality service, and ultimately fails to address the much larger group of customers who don't bother to call with their problems. It's not uncommon to hear stories like these from customers:

As a consumer, I have been part of this silently dissatisfied group: A few years ago, I decided that I simply could not survive another baseball season without seeing broadcasts of my favorite team's games. After a quick price comparison, I signed up with one of the satellite TV companies that had been aggressively marketing in my area.

By Vijay Mehrotra
Enkata



My experience with this service provider was decidedly mixed. Local weather problems caused some interruptions in service and technical problems with the provider's network often disrupted programming. There was also some confusion related to the billing associated with installation services.

At first, I made a few calls to the customer service call center and visited their Web site. But I noticed that some of the problems kept repeating. So I stopped looking for help, and instead suffered silently whenever problems occurred. When my friends asked about my service, I did not hide my frustrations.

When a special introductory offer came from one of my providers' competitors, I switched my service in a heartbeat. I have to believe I wasn't alone.

Hundreds of studies have shown that silently dissatisfied customers are a huge and hidden risk to businesses: the report by TARP estimates that 70 to 97 percent of customers who encountered a problem chose not to complain.

The same TARP study showed that when encountering a problem with a service provider that involved a loss of \$100 or more, only nine percent of those who chose not to reach out for help stayed loyal to the company.

Even minor problems and inconveniences will cause significant negative word of mouth from customers, while customers with more serious problems are likely to tell 40 or more people about their negative experiences.¹

Looking Beyond The Contact Center To The Root Causes

How can your company serve the silently dissatisfied customers who did not call yesterday — and will not call tomorrow? How can you address their problems when you don't know who they are or what their problems are? What can you do to maintain their loyalty?

By effectively analyzing the root causes of your vocal customers' contacts, you can also identify the problems experienced across your customer base. You can then pinpoint the operational improvements needed to eliminate service issues that lead to dissatisfaction. Root causes may originate in any number of functions across the organization, from marketing programs to self-service systems to back-office processes such as claims management and billing.

Understanding the reasons for customer contacts — and making correc-

tions to eliminate these causes — reduces incoming call volume and also eliminates the causes of dissatisfaction for the silently dissatisfied.

True operational performance management means integrating operational information from both the front and back office so organizations can get an end-to-end view of the entire customer lifecycle. This integrated information is then analyzed to drive operational improvements, decrease service costs and increase satisfaction for all customers, whether silent or vocal.

Companies that understand the root causes of customer contacts can identify the operational improvements that are needed to eliminate certain types of calls, improve customer satisfaction and reduce costs.

Outsourcing Requires Greater Operational Insight, Not Less

Identifying the root cause of call drivers becomes extremely challenging when customer service operations are outsourced. Third-party service providers can improve the quality of and reduce the cost to a service organization, but these benefits can quickly evaporate because of customer churn if a company

does not have customer feedback to learn which operational failures drive unwanted call volume.

In an outsourced environment where there is a lack of feedback mechanisms from the contact centers to the upstream functions, it is critical to have a centralized root cause identification capability that pinpoints the top customer “dissatisfiers” and call drivers. By implementing an operational performance management system to monitor front- and back-office service operations, companies retain the benefits of outsourcing without the expense of sacrificing operational control of their most important asset — their customers’ loyalty.

Solutions For Reaching The Silently Dissatisfied

To reduce costs while simultaneously increasing customer loyalty, today’s

companies need to understand not only *what* is going on within their business operations, but also *why* things are happening.

New technologies for operational performance management (OPM) provide quick and easy methods to identify the operational failures that drive contacts (from phone calls, e-mails, Web requests and chat sessions) by isolating the demographic, account, product, billing and marketing differences between customer groups that call, and those that do not.

An important thing to look for in an OPM solution is the ability to integrate data from both front-office and back-office operations. Analyzing beyond the traditional sources of data in the contact center — ACD reports, Web logs, etc. — is critical to gaining insight into the entire customer lifecycle. Businesses

need to include data from the back office (such as claims and billing information) to uncover the operational failures that cause unnecessary customer contacts, missed cross-sell opportunities and lower customer satisfaction. Done correctly, OPM will simultaneously improve service quality, lower contact center costs and increase customer loyalty — addressing not only the customers who call, but also those who don’t.

Don’t Wait For “The Call”

Not every quiet customer is a happy customer. Research has

How can your company serve the silently dissatisfied customers who did not call yesterday — and will not call tomorrow?

shown that silent, dissatisfied customers are far more prevalent than most companies want to admit; these customers are far less loyal in their repeat purchase behavior, and are likely to generate extensive word of mouth about their negative experiences.

Vocal dissatisfied customers are your biggest allies in helping you reach your silently dissatisfied segment. Only by understanding their problems and proactively eliminating the root causes of customer dissatisfaction in both front-office and back-office operations can organizations improve service to the entire customer base, including the silently dissatisfied customers who would otherwise have called only to say “goodbye.” [CIS](#)

1. Johnston, R. The Effect Of Intensity Of Dissatisfaction On Complaining Behaviour. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 11, p. 69-77, 1998.

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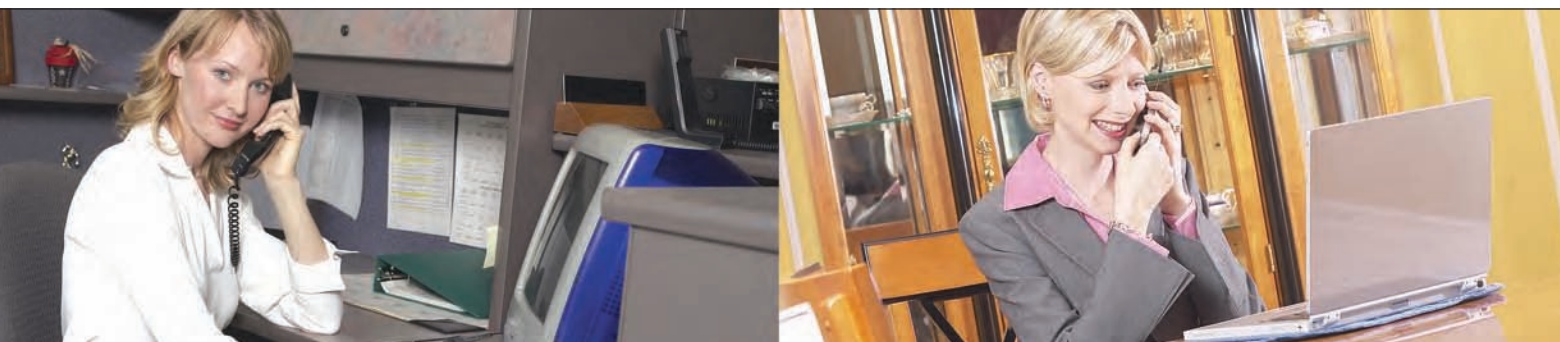
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North American Contact Centers: Why Are We Falling Behind?

Results from [Dimension Data's \(news - alert\)](#) recent Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report indicate that North American contact centers are lagging in several critical areas, including call response times, disaster recovery preparedness and security. This means that North American call centers — and the businesses that depend on them — may be at a greater risk for business disruption and customer defection. Why are North American call centers falling behind?

This is not a simple question to answer, and one that needs to be answered in two part — because call centers here in North America are falling behind in two ways — first in terms of the customer experience and second in their ability to plan adequately for the future. Each of these areas is detailed below, but here are some initial thoughts one should bear in mind when considering this issue.

North American call centers are falling behind for customers for two major reasons. The first is what some see as a disjointed deployment of technologies, some of which customers find frustrating to use; and the second reason is the impatience of North American customers who must contend with some of the longest wait times (34 seconds) anywhere in the world.

When it comes to planning for the unexpected — an unfortunate reality in today's world — North American call centers have not done as much as those in other regions. Less than one third of North American centers have developed and tested disaster recovery plans, and only 37 percent take any steps to authenticate callers — a fact that opens the door to concerning security risks.

In isolation, any one of these factors would be worth noting; but the fact

that call centers in North America have issues in each of these areas demonstrates that they are not keeping pace with those in other parts of the world. This article provides additional details on each of the issues in question, as well as suggestions for how companies might remedy the situation.

Rest assured that the picture is not all doom and gloom — there are areas where North American call centers are providing global leadership, but those cases tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

Exploring Technology

In this age of ever-advancing technology, it is easy to place some blame on older, inferior telephony systems; after all, North America has one of the oldest telecommunications infrastructures in the world and, as a result, a significant amount of legacy equipment in operation. However, North American contact centers do have one of the highest adoption rates of Internet Protocol (IP) compared to the rest of the world. This rapid adoption is important to success given that, as a whole, today's global enterprises are working aggressively to

adopt and deploy IP networks to speed up the transfer and storage of contact center calls and data.

Almost half of the contact centers that participated in the benchmarking survey indicated that they have hybrid or pure IP-PBX, a private branch exchange that switches calls between voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) users and a traditional telephone user. With a conventional PBX, separate networks are necessary for voice and data communications. With an IP-PBX, voice and data are able to travel over the same network, providing flexibility as an enterprise grows, and reducing long-term operation and maintenance costs.

Organizations also have automatic call distributor (ACD) switches. All the participants that indicated they were planning to install an ACD indicated that it would be a pure IP solution.

Looking deeper, support technologies in the contact center space, namely interactive voice response (IVR), outbound dialers and voice recording systems, show some lag in the migration to IP. Although these technologies are important in the contact center and are all available in pure (and in some cases hybrid) IP variants, they have slightly different technical requirements to consider when considering a move to IP.

By Kurt Mey
Dimension Data North America



- **IVR** is classically used for call steering and self-service applications. It is also used for queuing calls to agents, especially in hosted or network implementations. Rarely is an IP-based IVR deployed ahead of an IP-PBX or ACD (because of the way signaling takes place in a VoIP environment). However, this situation is expected to change over the coming year with the move towards Session Initiated Protocol (SIP) solutions from the currently dominant (H.323) VoIP standard.

- The migration to IP of **outbound call dialers** is increasing, but there has been some lag in transition to pure IP solutions. Dialers rely on a large amount of signaling information for call progress detection: to understand, for example, whether a call has been answered by a person, by a fax, by an answering machine, etc. In a traditional time division multiplexing (TDM) architecture, this signaling happens on the same line as the call and can be understood by dedicated hardware. An IP solution must either incorporate the same kind of call progress detection hardware or include the same logic in software,

which is difficult to achieve with the same levels of accuracy.

- **Call recording** products are also going through a transformation to support VoIP. TDM products can continue to be used to support recording in an IP contact center (through the use of trunk side recording, where calls are recorded on the TDM side of the voice or media gateway). The downside to this kind of call recording is it can't record agent-to-agent calls, only the part of a call a customer hears. Recording an agent-to-agent call in an IP contact center requires an IP-based call recording solution.

People, Please!

The benchmarking report also evaluated other factors, such as average speed to answer (ASA), a function of the number of calls placed to the call center and the available resources (agents) to answer the calls.

In fact, the findings indicate that North American contact centers are slowest to answer customer calls once the call is in an agent's queue. American call center operators wait, on average, 34 seconds to pick up the call, while

operators in Africa/Middle East on average wait 19 seconds, Europe/UK wait 22 seconds and Asia-Pacific averages 28 seconds speed-to-answer.

There is no disputing that technology can provide a more efficient and advanced means of distributing incoming calls to a greater number of resources, even resources in multiple locations, which could lower ASA. However, the issue with North America's higher ASA is more likely due to a lack of resources needed to meet increasing volumes of telephone calls — which represent more than 70 percent of contact center interactions.

Even with the growing — and successful — use of alternative channels like e-mail or chat (one area where North American call centers lead the world) and interactive voice response (IVR), organizations still have not addressed the steady increase in call volume and the typical North American customer's desire to "speak" directly with an agent.

Another important measure in determining contact center performance is the rate of call abandonment. Call aban-

don times and rates are more telling statistics because they relate to the customer's willingness to wait on the line, and studies show that North Americans are the most frustrated customers in the world, willing to wait an average of only 37 seconds for their calls to be answered. The rest of the world exhibits greater patience. Consumers in Europe, the Middle East and Africa are willing to wait 67 seconds before abandoning a call. People in Asia-Pacific are the most patient at 72 seconds. Cost-cutting measures meant to reduce numbers of agent staff that do not address growing call volumes can spur frustration for end users, resulting in call abandonment.

The good news is that increasing efficiencies and improving service are becoming more important to contact centers. After years of being viewed as a "necessary evil" in the business world, contact centers are finally being recognized as a value-added resource for the enterprise. In the competitive global market, and specifically within industries where products are a commoditized service (telecom, financial services), effective contact centers distinguish one company from another.

Disaster Recovery And Security

Other factors contributing to North American call centers' poor performance include their minimal efforts around security and disaster recovery. While these issues remain a top issue for most organizations around the world, this year's benchmarking report shows that less than one-third of North American contact centers have tested disaster recovery plans, compared with 45 percent in Asia-Pacific and 49 percent in Africa/Middle East. Similarly, security concerns are highest in emerging markets, with approximately 50 percent of contact centers in Africa/Middle East and Asia-Pacific authenticating customers on some or all calls, compared to only 37 percent of respondents in North America. (European contact centers appear to share a similar disregard for security and disaster recovery as those in

North America with 31 percent reporting tested disaster recovery plans and 39 percent authenticating callers' identities.)

To be fair, with an increase in multi-location call centers and access to the world's best carrier networks, North American contact centers have historically had less issues and concerns with regard to disaster recovery planning than those in other areas of the world. However, with the recent run of natural disasters and severe weather conditions, those same multi-location contact centers have been challenged to maintain 100 percent service capabilities.

In addition, the rash of corporate scandals, security breaches and subsequent legislation have forced several industries, specifically financial services and healthcare, to ensure that voice conversations, e-mail exchanges and IM interactions are securely recorded, stored and retrievable for as long as seven years, putting unprecedented pressure on networks to stay up and running at all costs. The adoption of disaster recovery systems will also almost certainly increase as the government keeps its spotlight on security breaches and system failures.

Where the cost-cutting consolidation of infrastructure and adoption of new technology have clearly provided benefits to organizations overall, the opposite is true when it comes to disaster recovery efforts. The high cost of real estate and the continued rationalization of operations have reduced the overall number of contact centers that organizations have at their disposal. The increasing number of communication channels also requires a different level of planning. The old days of simply switching a call from one location to another does not work as well for self-service platforms or e-commerce-driven IM capabilities, for example. These channels require the same attention as any other corporate backend system when planning for potential disasters.

To that end, these systems are often viewed as alternatives to speaking with live agents not only during the normal

course of doing business but in the event of a disaster. It is commonplace for callers to be redirected to the Web or to an "automated system" prior to reaching a live agent. These systems can be used to offer customer information or to off-load call volume by providing upfront messaging that a location is closed, or that waits are longer due to an emergency.

The Remedy: A Holistic Approach

With corporate emphasis shifting to customer satisfaction and the increased recognition that contact centers have more direct contact with the customer than any other department, organizations need to take a holistic view of the contact center, focusing on the customer, the employees and the technology that serves both groups.

The need for better customer service goes without saying. Polite, efficient agents who are willing to go the extra mile to help a caller go a long way toward establishing goodwill and customer loyalty. That said, there need to be changes in the way agents are motivated and their performance measured. Upselling, cross-selling and first-call resolution are all popular metrics for evaluating contact center agents.

Agents will perform based on their evaluation criteria, though more often than not, performance measurement and desired outcome are counter-intuitive and may even be contradictory. For example, it makes little sense to have an aggressive goal on first-call resolution where agents are measured on average handling time (AHT). These goals don't match up. The overall objectives of the contact center need to be clearly aligned right down to the agent performance criteria.

On the technology front, proper training for call/e-mail/IM handling and recording is imperative. Beyond that, North American organizations need to take a hard look at their disaster recovery systems to ensure 24/7 availability. The following four steps are critical in disaster- and recovery-planning:

- First, an organization needs to understand the business impact of a contact center that isn't operating, whether it's for hours, days or weeks. How long can you be down or have limited servicing capability? Knowing the cost to the business will drive the disaster recovery planning process.

- Organizations should then determine the areas in which they are vulnerable. Is it resources? Access control? Call routing? Platform redundancy? Go through the whole punch list to ensure there are no surprises waiting in the wings.

- The third step is to determine which option works best for the business. Is it a remote standby site, alternative channels (IVR and Web), an arrangement with offshore outsourcers or a load-sharing arrangement if the business has multiple sites? Considering the different types of outage — and their potential duration — will help determine which options should be considered.

- Finally, the plan needs to be reviewed and tested regularly. Businesses are constantly changing and technology is evolving in ways that require these plans to be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. Business impacts and opportunities as a result of technology also need to be reviewed and considered.

There are many factors that affect the performance of contact centers, with room for improvement in North America and beyond. The increased emphasis on customer service to achieve and maintain market share in a global economy will force organizations to invest significant time and money into security, technology and training. Thus, it is important that organizations step back and take a look at each contact center individually to design a holistic plan for improvement. **CIS**

Kurt Mey is Customer Interaction Solutions Specialist for Dimension Data North America, a member of Dimension Data Holdings, plc. The company is a specialist

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CallMiner Reduces Hardware For Speech Analytics

CallMiner, ([news - alert](#)) a developer of enterprise class speech analytics software, has announced the commercial release and deployment of its Virtual Server Room (VSR) technology. VSR, combined with CallMiner's speech processing and analytics suite, can help enable call centers to deploy medium- and large-scale speech analytics implementations with less hardware than previously required. VSR, according to the company, has the potential to change the speech analytics landscape, because companies need no longer engage in partial mining and sacrifice data due to hardware constraints.

Other solutions, according to CallMiner, do not offer high processing power to mine 100 percent of all recorded calls in medium and large speech analytics deployments. Therefore, most recorded data are not analyzed, and valuable business intelligence is lost or ignored. With VSR, a company's unused computing resources are used to power CallMiner's speech processing engine, eliminating the need for costly single-purpose servers required for speech analytics implementations. VSR employs the unused or idle processing power within a network to process large volumes of recorded audio for use by CallMiner's analytics. Though VSR is now being exclusively used with CallMiner's speech-analytics, it can also be customized to power other computer-intensive enterprise software applications.

<http://www.callminer.com>

VoiceGenie And Convedia Partner

VoiceGenie Technologies Inc., ([news - alert](#)) a supplier of standards-based media controller software, and **Convedia Corporation**, ([news - alert](#)) which produces IP media servers, have announced that their Multimedia Resource Function (MRF) component for IP Multimedia Subsystems is ready for demonstration. Highlighting a key enabler for mobile service providers — a componentized IMS solution for delivering speech, touch-tone and visually-enabled applications — demonstrations, to be arranged with either Convedia or VoiceGenie, aim to help customers realize the potential of the value-added services, which combine spoken, touch-tone and visual interactions.

The combined VoiceGenie and Convedia solution delivers a Media Resource Function (MRF) for 3G, IMS and Fixed Mobile Convergence deployments. Convedia's IP media server processes multiple media resources and VoiceGenie's media controller controls the interactions between media and speech servers to deliver rich interactive services to users, regardless of the devices, protocols and networks they are using.

<http://www.voicegenie.com> and <http://www.convedia.com>

Definition Du Jour

Artificial Neural Network (ANN)

An Artificial Neural Network is a basic, computerized model of the pathways and network of the human brain, or a "biologically inspired" method of computing. The process of storing information as patterns and utilizing those patterns, as the brain does, and then solving problems based on the information, is considered by some to be a next-generation method of computing. Artificial Neural Network processes can allow for better pattern recognition and learning on the part of the computer, which is why the method is highly applicable to speech recognition.

Voxeo Announces Prophecy

Voxeo Corporation, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of voice application platforms, has announced Voxeo Prophecy, a new platform designed to make it easier and more affordable for enterprises to create and deploy speech applications. Voxeo Prophecy was designed to eliminate traditional barriers to enterprise speech deployment by bundling a full-featured telephony platform with speech recognition and synthesis at less than one-fifth the cost of previous offerings.

Prophecy is a speech platform, a versatile voice-over-IP (VoIP) platform and an interactive voice response (IVR) platform, all rolled into a single software download. With an abundance of telephony features, Prophecy also aims to deliver improved functionality over previous offerings. According to the company, Prophecy breaks through traditional industry barriers by providing high-quality speech recognition and speech synthesis capabilities at no additional cost, making it "the first telephony platform that enables developers to easily and cost-effectively add speech functionality to telephony applications."

Other Prophecy features include call conferencing, call recording, comprehensive SIP-based VoIP telephony support, a built-in soft-phone, the SQLite database engine, and a Web server supporting PHP 5.1 and Java/JSP, all in a single 80 megabyte download with zero configuration requirements.

<http://www.voxeo.com>

“

“The written or printed book is only a series of hints, as elliptical as the neumes of Byzantine music, from which the reader thus works out for himself the speech-gestures which alone have the gift of expression.”

— R.G. (Robin George) Collingwood
(1889–1943), British philosopher

”

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It's all about flexibility and response time when your business is providing contact handling services to address a wide range of business requirements. And frankly, what we don't always think about, but we all face, it's how to apply technologies in such a way that it enables our business to retain the best and brightest employees that underpin our success.

eCallogy is in the business of providing call handling services to a customer base that ranges from Federal, state and local governments to customer service and order capture type functions for commercial businesses. Everyone needs something different and they all want "it" to integrate with their off-the-shelf or custom database that resides on their premises. What technologies does eCallogy rely on that enables them to respond quickly and effectively to this wide range of needs — a hosted, on-demand contact handling solution.

This webinar will cover the operational and business benefits eCallogy has experienced by going with a hosted contact handling service. Patterson will discuss how eCallogy uses inContact to create new contact handling processes in minutes or hours. Many of these applications involve delivering data to foreign CRM or custom databases. He will cover how inContact enables his business to leverage a wide range of feature sets, yet pay only for capacity used, month-to-month. And he will explain how eCallogy retains superior employee talent by supporting at-home workers. Using inContact, eCallogy can monitor, record and report on at-home workers as one unified workforce. Learn more about how this leading edge customer contact handling operation stays competitive in today's changing contact center environment.

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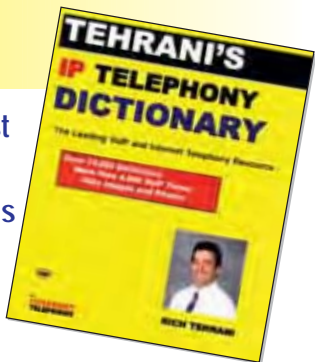
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By Tracey E. Schelmetic
Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

Two Sides Of The Same IVR

You've probably heard of Paul English by now. He's the guy who put together the increasingly famous "IVR Cheat Sheet," a sort of step-by-step "how-to" guide for customers who hate automated systems and want a fast way to be connected to a carbon-based life form with a pulse. Via viral e-mails and news reports, the IVR Cheat Sheet has escalated in popularity and legend and has now turned into a high-traffic Web site called GetHuman.com, a database of companies with large customer bases and tips for navigating through their self-service systems to not only get to a human, but get customer issues dealt with more successfully.

For example, for my customer service nemesis, Comcast, there are instructions to either press "000" to be connected with a human, or alternatively to do nothing...be silent and wait, press no buttons, and be connected with a human. I checked it out. It works. Up until now, I had been convinced that Comcast didn't actually employ any humans.

But as we know from school, every action has a reaction. Angel.com, a McLean, Virginia-based provider of on-demand call center and IVR solutions, was the first company to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Paul English.

Angel.com responded to the "IVR Cheat Sheet" by releasing an "IVR Cheat Sheet for Businesses," a list of tips companies can use to make their IVR systems more user-friendly and efficient. It includes practical tips such as letting callers know what to expect upfront from the IVR, never hiding the method to connect to a live agent, always announcing to queued callers an approximate wait time, and avoiding making customers repeat their information each time they get transferred. (You can view the IVR Cheat Sheet For Businesses at <http://www.tmcnet.com/259.1>). The company also responded by purchasing the Google keyword "Paul English," so searchers looking for information on the [IVR \(define - news - alert\)](#) Cheat Sheet find Angel.com's Web site as the number one sponsored link. English had some comments for Angel.com that would have gotten him thrown off the playground if this had been grade school. There have also been stories of fake comments in support of Angel.com posted on the blogs of major media outlets that have covered the story.

Angel.com responded once again by announcing last month's launch of IVR University, its online training and development resource to teach best practices for IVR design and implementation. According to Angel.com, the mission of IVR University is "to promote the best practices of IVR design and implementation, to ensure a useful and efficient caller experience, and to help businesses optimize their phone-based customer service." Best practices instruction and certification are available for voice user interface (VUI) design, IVR application development and CRM/database integration, among other topics.


They way I look at it, any rhetoric against Paul English and

his IVR Cheat Sheet is self-delusion. The Teleservices Sales Rule taught us all that if an industry doesn't effectively self-regulate an unpopular technology or business practice (i.e., outbound telemarketing in the case of the TSR), there are government agencies and politicians happy to step in and go overboard on regulating. (In the politicians' case, particularly when there are votes to be bought by opposing an unpopular technology.) Poorly designed IVRs are universally hated. Perhaps you have seen the Citicard television commercial in which a nerdy-looking man accidentally sets his kitchen on fire while trying to cook dinner and navigate an evil IVR menu tree ("For customer service in English about an existing account, press 57"). The commercial makes us laugh because the complaint is universal, along with those impossible-to-open plastic clamshell packages and long lines and inept service at the Department of Motor Vehicles. We love to complain about them.

Many producers of IVR have a good counter-point to all this: that bad IVR design is usually the fault of the company that buys and configures the IVR, not the manufacturer. An IVR menu tree can be configured to be as simple and user-friendly or as evil and blood-pressure escalating as a customer service organization wishes. But in light of the IVR's *persona non grata* status in popular culture, many customer service organizations are beginning to realize that promising simple navigation and easy access to human agents is a marketing differential. Citicorp is only the first to begin using it as a competitive point in their advertising. Others will surely follow.

The ironic part is, what both sides' opinions boil down to is: IVRs need to be better designed because customers hate them. The rest is...oh, I don't know...rhetoric that's just exciting enough to get everybody into editorials in the Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, National Public Radio's Morning Edition, ABC's World News Tonight and others, including, of course, the highly coveted, world-famous back page of *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine. **CIS**


The editor, who believes that if Dante had had plastic clamshell packaging in his day, he would have relegated a special circle of his inferno for the designers of such packaging, can be reached at tschelmetic@tmcnet.com.



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