



# CUSTOMER INTER@CTION *Solutions*®

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## Home Agents

Evaluating The Home Agent Model

### Also In This Issue:

- **THE 20 HABITS OF LOUSY MARKETERS**
- Who's Who In Teleservices
- TMC Labs Reviews GN Netcom's GN 9350 DECT 6.0 Headset
- Finding Truth In Your Recorded Call Data

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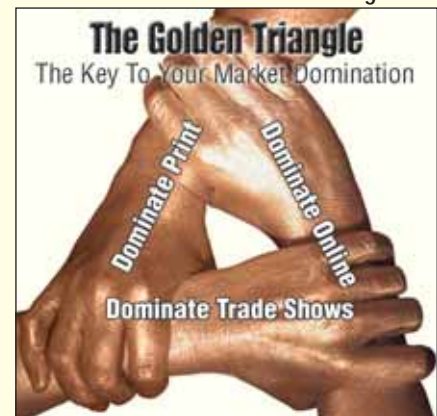


By: Nadji Tehrani,  
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Editor-in-Chief,  
Technology Marketing Corporation

## On Marketing Blunders...

# THE 20 HABITS OF LOUSY MARKETERS

Figure 1.



If you are wondering what triggered this editorial, I would have to answer that there comes a time when I have observed so many marketing problems that if I don't write about them, I will probably explode!

Before I proceed with this column, I would like to make it abundantly clear that the objective of this particular Publisher's Outlook is not to be overly critical or hurt anyone's feelings, but to point out some of the major, costly problems that continue to exist in Corporate America when it comes to marketing.

I would like to quickly review some of the marketing imperatives that I have covered in previous editorials, as follows:

1. **The Old Fact:** If you don't market, you don't exist;
2. **The New Fact:** If you are not on

4. As a Professor of Harvard once said, "Companies exist for two reasons: marketing and innovation";
5. Integrated marketing is the only effective way to market today;
6. To stand out from the competition, you must think out of the box; and
7. Marketing is not a part-time job!

Having said that, I would now like to focus on some of the major problems that exist in Corporate America's marketing departments, as follows:

1. **Having a full marketing staff without a marketing budget!** Believe it or not, there are many companies that have a full staff of marketing people without a dime to spend on marketing! In light of this, you have to wonder how long it will take before these companies go out of business or go nowhere.

2. **Spend millions of dollars to develop great new products or services and have no money or budget for marketing!**

In previous editorials, I have pointed out that it is not about how good your

Many years of marketing experience have taught me a great lesson: that market share leaders in any industry are those who have an outstanding marketing strategy first and then a good product behind it.

the first page of Google ([quote - news - alert](#)) or Yahoo ([quote - news - alert](#)), you don't exist;

3. In marketing, timing is everything;



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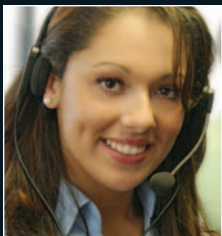
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product is. In today's marketplace, it is how great your marketing is. Even if you have a mediocre product, you can command a great market share if you have powerful marketing.

**3. Hire marketing staff that cannot pass a simple marketing test!** As I have indicated in previous editorials, better than 98 percent of people who apply for marketing jobs at TMC fail to pass our simple marketing test. On that test, the first question is "define marketing." You would be amazed by how many people with degrees in marketing and years of experience cannot even define marketing!

**4. Place a lousy ad in magazines or online and run it over and over again, only to find there are no inquiries or sales leads for that ad.** As I have stated many times before, in advertising, like many other parts of business today, the rule is "garbage in, garbage out." When I look through many publications, I rarely find an ad that makes me stop and notice and remember the ad years later. Great ads that remain in the reader's mind permanently are those that produce significant sales results.

**5. Ignore the first law of positioning!** There are many companies that do not even know what the first law of positioning is! These companies will flounder for a few years with no plans to go anywhere. My favorite expression in this case is from Yogi Berra, the great player for the New York Yankees, who said, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up someplace else!" Having said that, the first law of positioning reads as follows, "It is better to be first than to be better." Please read this law again. "It is better to be first than to be better." For reasoning behind this comment, I invite you to read past editorials on differentiation and positioning. Before I get away from this first law of positioning, it is important to notice that to be first in anything is like being on the first page of Google, simply because few, if any, people will go beyond the first page when they conduct a search online.

**6. Ignore the all-important differentiation.** It is vitally important to note that any and all marketing pieces, including all advertisements, must clearly

ly differentiate the advertiser from its competition. In other words, without clearly articulated differentiation, the customer has no reason whatsoever to buy from such advertisers.

**7. Ignore Positioning.** Once again, it is of paramount importance to define the position of your product or service so that readers and/or customers can understand the nature of your product offering.

**8. Ignore Outsourcing.** It has been clearly pointed out not only in this editorial, but also in the national business press, that companies would be wise to focus on their core-competency simply because outsourcers such as teleservices companies have a much higher degree of expertise in both sales, customer service, lead generation, collection, fund-raising, etc.

**9. Ignore thinking out of the box.** Given that each person is exposed every week to thousands of commercials, marketing pieces and advertisements, unless you think out of the box and make sure that your product offering stands above the crowd, you will not be noticed and, therefore, you cannot expect proper lead generation.

**10. Make sure the marketing manager understands not only your business but also your competitors.** No marketing person can survive without industry knowledge and competitive knowledge.

**11. Companies that do not believe in marketing and look for a cheap solution such as PR only or e-mail only and totally ignore integrated marketing will only run down the business while going nowhere!**

**12. They change the company name several times and keep it a secret.** As ill-advised as this may seem, there have been many companies in the call center/CRM and teleservices industries that have acquired other companies and changed the name yet didn't tell anyone about it. Many of these customers have lost considerable market share and/or have gone out of business because no one knew who they were, and no one buys anything from a company they have never heard of. Nevertheless, this kind of stupidity continues.

**13. Lousy marketers think that the**

**market exists because of their product whereas in fact, it is the other way around.** Their product can exist if and only if the marketplace has a need for it.

**14. Lousy marketers ignore brand recognition.** As that famous McGraw-Hill advertisement so eloquently stated:

- "I don't know you;
- I don't know your product;
- I don't know your company;
- Now what is it that you wanted to sell me?"

In plain English, if you don't have brand recognition, don't waste your time trying to sell a lot of products. You will always have an uphill battle.

**15. Senior management of lousy marketing companies considers marketing a necessary evil. Obviously, those companies have no future.**

**16. Ignore online, trade show and print advertising altogether.** There is no way a company that ignores these three vital components of integrated marketing will survive.

**17. Lousy marketers cut the marketing budget to the bone in a recession and/or when the sales are down!** This is the opposite of what they should be doing. In fact, this is the best time for competition to increase their market share at the expense of the lousy marketer!

**18. Lousy marketers ignore timing.** As stated above, in marketing, timing is everything. For example, if you are conducting a trade show on January 15th, you don't want your marketing piece to arrive on your prospects' desks on January 20th. If this is what your company has been doing, you might as well use the following headline on your next brochures: "Here is what you missed last week!!" Believe it or not, I have observed this several times!!

**19. Lousy marketers place a poorly prepared and designed ad two to three times a year in a magazine and they call that marketing.** When such a feeble attempt at marketing fails to produce results, the marketer commits three more mistakes as, follows:

- a. **Mistake #1: He or she blames the publication or Web site where the lousy ad appeared!**

The fact is that a poorly prepared ad will not produce anything, no

# *I am cat.*



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matter where you place it.

- b. **Mistake #2: He or she tries to cover up the problem by saying, "Advertising does not work!"** In other words, the lousy marketer is barking up the wrong tree!!
- c. **Mistake #3: The lousy marketer thinks that placing an ad two or three times a year is enough to give him or her proper results.** The fact is that in advertising, frequency is everything. Indeed, many studies have shown that a frequency of 12 to 15 times placement is necessary to produce the desired results provided that the ad is professionally conceived and prepared by a reputable advertising agency with adequate input from the marketer.

**20. Lousy marketers have either no relationship with the media or they have broken the relationship with the leading media!** Warren Buffet, arguably the world's #1 financial wizard with a net worth of \$42 billion, introduced five secrets of his success in a recent interview.

One of the keys to his success is, "Make friends with the media." It is mind-boggling that so many companies either have no relationship with the leading media in their field and, even worse, at least one company went out of its way to break relations with the leading media in our industry and that company, based on very reliable information, has lost considerable market share and is about to go out of business!

**The Billionaires And Multimillionaires In The Contact Center, CRM And Teleservices Industries Have One Thing In Common...**

Gary and Mary West were **MASTER MARKETERS** and did not make the above mistakes! In fact, in the October 9, 2006 issue of *FORBES* magazine, with the cover story titled, "The 400 Richest People in America" on page 180, we were happy to find Gary and Mary West, each with \$1.1 billion net worth!

Gary and Mary were the founders and owners of the world-famous West Corporation, a symbol of quality and integrity in the contact center, CRM

and teleservices industries. They were my mentors, and they have been the loyal advertisers of this publication (on cover two and page one) for the last 19 consecutive years.

### In Summary

Many years of marketing experience have taught me a great lesson: that market share leaders in any industry are those who have an outstanding marketing strategy first and then a good product behind it. In today's marketplace, to become THE global market leader in any industry, you must follow what I call the **golden triangle** (see Figure 1).

1. **You must dominate the Web.** Not only do you need to be on the first page of the leading search engines, but you need to be #1 on the first page and use a powerful SEO technology to make sure that you will remain #1 forever on the first page. Anything less than that will not convey the message that you are the industry leader and that you deserve maximum market share.

2. **You must dominate your trade show participation.** Once again, in any given trade show, you will be competing for attendee or delegate attention with nearly 200, 300 or 500 other exhibitors. The only way to get the maximum qualified sales leads is to stand above the crowd and think out of the box. In plain English, you must own the trade show through sponsorships, banners and other unusual marketing techniques so that anyone who attends the show knows that your company is a major player in your industry. There is no shortcut for that.

3. **Equally, you must dominate print media.** Not only do you need to prepare outstanding, benefit-driven brochures and marketing collaterals and advertising but, once again, you need to think out of the box. For example, you must consider a unique methodology by which you will be marketing through education. In today's marketplace, high technology products are sold in one and only one powerful way and that is marketing through education.

As always, I value your comments. Please e-mail them to me at [ntehrani@tmcnet.com](mailto:ntehrani@tmcnet.com). Good luck and best wishes. **CIS**

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By Rich Tehrani, TMC President & Editor-in-Chief

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

# Web 2.0 Meets VoIP And Call Center 2.0

The most interesting thing happening in the call center industry today is the next-generation movement called Call Center 2.0. Like every other concept with a 2.0 moniker, this means many different things, depending on who you are and from what angle you face the industry. For the purpose of this article, we'll define Call Center 2.0 as a collection of applications and/or services that takes advantage of Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 has a few definitions of its own, and it may be helpful to review them. When we discuss Web 2.0, we include the following factors:

1. Multimedia or audio/video-based sites such as YouTube;
2. Sites utilizing AJAX (asynchronous JavaScript and XML), a technology that allows a Web-based application to seem as fast and seamless as locally installed software. Google maps (maps.google.com) is an example of AJAX;
3. Web sites that function based on community input and contributions. Again, [YouTube \(news - alert\)](#) is a good example, as is [digg \(news - alert\) \(http://www.digg.com\)](#); and
4. Mashups, or the seamless passing of information between applications and Web sites.

I recently came across a call center solution that takes advantage of my last factor, mashups. Though it is not a mashup itself, it does take advantage of the seamless passing of information from one application to another. SKY-click is a free call center solution that leverages the [Skype \(news - alert\)](#) client and offers users a call center solution that can scale to meet an organization's needs. It includes the kind of vital features necessary in a professional solution: time management, call dispatch-

ing, managing the availability of collaborators, a missed call solution, feedback management as well as music on hold.

By integrating the solution into your Web site, you can allow customers to call your call center via Skype using VoIP, chat/IM and video. In addition, SKY-click PRO is available on salesforce.com's AppExchange and can be run on your existing hardware and software environment.

In addition to SKY-click Pro, SKY-click launched SKIPI. This entirely free service will enable customers to add functions to the SKYPE ME buttons used on the Web site, blog or e-mail signature that allows users to contact a company or individual quickly and easily.

SKIPI is basically the same service as SKY-click Pro, but it is free and does not offer the reporting built into SKY-click Pro. Both services work by allowing you to put multiple Skype user IDs behind a SKYPE ME button. You can have unlimited Skype names behind a button, but if you have more callers than agents, the extra callers get a busy signal or go into voice mail.

It is worth noting that SKY-Click Pro has feedback and reporting features absent from the SKIPI product. However, since it is free, it may make sense for

smaller centers to start off with SKIPI.

At the moment, this sort of product is aimed at niche users because it works only with Skype. Agents will have to have multiple interfaces to the customer, including a typical ACD for PSTN calls.

In addition, there is no skills-based routing built into the product, so agents are randomly distributed on the call. But free is free, so many small, start-up companies may find this solution invaluable. The product shows tremendous promise, and having a PSTN link is very easily accomplished with a PIKA Connect board from [Pika Technologies \(news - alert\) \(http://www.pikatechnologies.com\)](#). What this board does is interface between Skype and Asterisk PBXs. Although the underlying complexities of this interface are beyond the scope of this article, it is sufficient to say that soon we can expect to see this sort of service accommodating all different types of calls. All agents can be Skype clients, and calls can come in via SIP, Skype, the [PSTN \(define - news - alert\)](#) or via other protocols supported by Asterisk.

At the moment, SKIPI, the free service, is targeted to communities, social networks, dating services or companies seeking to offer their customers the ability to speak with their commercial or accounting departments directly from their Web site, or for free online advertising campaigns.

You may have noticed, from this and previous editorials, that I find this kind of service amazing. The reason it impresses me so much is the integration of the products and services from Skype

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to salesforce.com. As more integrated solutions proliferate, companies are now becoming free to mix and match solutions, Web 2.0 style, and end up creating Call Center 2.0 applications.

You may remember (or you may have read) that about 20 years ago, to have integration between applications, you needed CTI links from Rockwell that worked with IBM mainframes. Only organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets could afford to do this sort of thing, and the products back then were rudimentary at best. Now you can build a best-of-breed video call center for free!

In addition, this solution also allows for IP contact center functionality, and using the wideband codec in Skype allows for better sound quality than the PSTN!

So it's free and it sounds better than PSTN-based solutions. It's not hard to see why this solution has so much potential. Hopefully, you're as excited about it as I am.

The challenge, of course, is how to make money as the market evolves. SKY-click is delivering Pro versions of solutions that generate the revenue while giving away the entry-level products. This is the sort of model being used by Skype — the giveaway gets users hooked, and Skype earns money from incremental service features such as minutes used on Skype Out and Skype In.

This giveaway approach is becoming more commonplace in the tech industry, and allows for rapid distribution of products and services. The success of products like Asterisk and Skype is certainly influencing an entire generation of developers, and one wonders how many of these virally spread products can gain the mass appeal of Skype or Asterisk. We will see how this one does. So far, I like the idea, and it remains to be seen how call centers will take to this sort of solution.

For more information please read "SKY-click Releases SKIPI — The Free Call Center" (<http://www.tmcnet.com/394.1>) and check out the Call Center 2.0 Conference January 24-26, 2007 in Fort Lauderdale (<http://www.callcenter20.com>). **cis**

## The "Self-Healing, Self Optimizing Call Center" At The **Call Center 2.0** Conference

Former Telephony@Work CEO Eli Borodow, now with Oracle (Telephony@Work was purchased by Oracle in June 2006), gave a riveting speech recently at the Call Center 2.0 Conference about how the call center of the future will be increasingly automated and flexible. The Call Center 2.0 Conference was collocated with the recent INTERNET TELEPHONY Conference & Expo WEST, which took place in October at the San Diego Convention Center.

As you can imagine, Eli touched on multitenancy (a core differentiator of Telephony@Work's products) and went on to say that multitenancy is useful not only for service providers but also for many large customers that are able to take advantage of multitenancy to share infrastructure across sites and business units without sacrificing local autonomy and control over each group's business processes.

Call Center 2.0 was the theme of this keynote, with a focus on tight integration with Oracle's CRM offerings; unification of the disciplines of customer relationship management and customer interaction management; multitenancy and its benefits for corporate hosting (to service diverse internal business units on common infrastructure) and commercial hosting of IP contact center technology (through carrier-partners and Oracle itself); as well as the differentiated ability to adapt and change IP contact center ACD business processes in real-time via human input into Oracle's Unified Administration Manager tool (for their multi-channel ACD offerings).

The goal of such adaptability is to achieve ongoing technology lifecycle renewal, increase efficiency and maximize customer satisfaction. Eli also alluded to the fact that real-time automated business process optimization is "Call Center 3.0" and that much of that is possible at Oracle today, via Oracle's Business Intelligence Suite, which includes its acquisition of Sigma Dynamics (a real-time analytics company that can enable real-time automated business process optimization for call centers on a custom basis based on a customized set of performance goals). Eli's vision is that such technology will ultimately be packaged as a "productized" and pre-integrated solution to empower mass market, mainstream call centers to get the most out of their Oracle ACD and CRM investments.

The point is that we will soon see an increase in our ability to automate call center optimization with metrics that are driven by performance goals, and our ability to make real-time adjustments to technology-driven business processes. The technology should soon become easier to implement and more affordable.

So while we at TMC thought we were ahead of the curve by launching our Call Center 2.0 Conference, perhaps the call center market is moving even faster than we imagined.

Certainly, Oracle's vision of the call center of the future is very exciting and portends a business environment in which call centers become more efficient than we ever dreamed possible.

To learn more about Call Center 2.0 topics such as these, I'd like to invite readers to attend the Call Center 2.0 Conference to be held January 24-26, 2007 in Ft Lauderdale, Florida (<http://www.callcenter20.com>). This year, we will be adding some incentives to make it fun. A lucky attendee will walk away with a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and another will win a Toyota FJ Cruiser. You must be present to win, so be there and get ready to learn all about Call Center 2.0 at the only conference in the world dedicated to the topic. Visit <http://www.callcenter20.com> for details.

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- Marrying Technology & Human Performance
- Where to VoIP
- To Host or Not to Host?
- IP Contact Center Shootout
- Effective Integration of Multiple Contact Channels
- Calling for More Than Quality Assurance
- Call Center Architectures with Custom Workflows



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

### ClientLogic And SITEL To Merge

Global teleservices/BPO providers **ClientLogic** ([news - alert](#)) and **SITEL** ([news - alert](#)) have announced that they have entered into a definitive merger agreement. Under the terms of the agreement, a newly formed subsidiary of ClientLogic will merge with SITEL and pay \$4.05 per share in cash for all of the outstanding common stock of SITEL. The Board of Directors of each company has unanimously approved the transaction. The transaction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2007 and is subject to customary closing conditions, including approval of SITEL's shareholders and regulatory clearances. SITEL's Board of Directors has recommended to SITEL's shareholders that they vote in favor of the transaction. Approximately 19.9 percent of the outstanding common stock of SITEL is subject to voting agreements which require such shares to be voted in favor of the merger. SITEL has agreed to pay a termination fee to ClientLogic should the transaction not close due to certain circumstances. ClientLogic will fund the transaction with the proceeds of a committed loan facility. The transaction values SITEL at approximately \$450 million. The combined entity will continue to be named ClientLogic Corporation, and will have approximately 65,000 employees across 28 countries. Dave Garner will be Chief Executive Officer of the combined entity.  
<http://www.clientlogic.com>

### Spanlink Introduces Mobile Supervisor Workstation

**Spanlink Communications** ([news - alert](#)) has introduced Spanlink Mobile Supervisor Workstation, a portable, hand-held tool that allows contact center supervisors to monitor, manage schedules and collaborate with agents regardless of location. Mobile Supervisor Workstation extends the Spanlink InteractiveEdge line of products, which are built to transform centralized contact center environments into virtual customer interaction networks. The product was designed to enable supervisors to maintain constant contact with agents from any location with wireless access. Supervisors can attend meetings or work offsite and still provide effective coaching and receive immediate notification of all contact center activity and issues, enabling quick response time for optimal productivity and consistent customer interaction.  
<http://www.spanlink.com>

### Verint Introduces Customer Interaction Analytics

**Verint Systems Inc.**, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of analytic software-based solutions for security and business intelligence, recently announced the introduction of Customer Interaction Analytics (CI Analytics), a new enterprise analytics offering that helps organizations transform customer relationships through actionable intelligence.

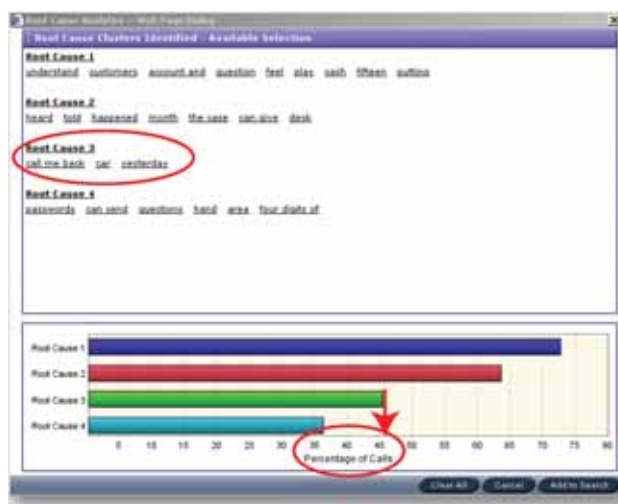
CI Analytics combines platform-agnostic speech analytics with a proven Interaction Intelligence methodology to help organizations enhance customer retention and satisfaction, increase first-call resolution and improve sales and self-service effectiveness. CI Analytics operates independently of call recording infrastructure that may already be deployed in the enterprise. Designed to be delivered as a managed service via a network of certified consulting partners, CI Analytics is ideally suited for large enterprises with traditionally high volumes of customer interactions.

CI Analytics is built on Verint's speech analytics and expertise in customer behavior analysis, business process optimization and operational transformation techniques developed by working with prominent enterprises around the world. This unique combination of technology and methodology enables enterprises to identify their most important interactions and analyze their true impact on customer relationships. Armed with this intelligence, CI Analytics then determines a new approach to these "moment of truth" interactions that promotes greater customer centricity and better business outcomes.

"By unbundling Verint's proven speech technology and customer relationship methodology from our contact center analytics, our CI Analytics offering enables enterprises, regardless of their recording platform, to build stronger and more profitable customer relationships. This new approach makes Verint Solutions available to a broader range of customers and supports our expanding enterprise actionable intelligence strategy," said Dan Bodner, CEO and President of Verint.  
<http://www.verint.com>

### Dirigosoft Launches Dirigo iQueue

**Dirigosoft Corporation**, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of customer contact solutions for small and medium-sized businesses, has announced the debut of Dirigo iQueue, an intelligent assistant-based communications solution combining an array of robust private branch exchange (PBX) features with the advanced capabilities of automatic call distribution (ACD) solutions to support customer contact strategies. Designed with the functionality, scalability and redundancy of world-class, enterprise solutions, Dirigo iQueue is priced specifically for small and medium-sized businesses with up to 500 users or five- to 150-position contact centers. According to the company, Dirigo iQueue is easy to install and use and is highly configurable. It comes with a set of traditional PBX and ACD features, among others. iQueue delivers actionable data through real-time reporting and results, including insight into queue depths and service levels; measurements for successful campaigns and initiatives with business results; and improved agent management with local or remote monitoring.  
<http://www.dirigosoft.com>





### NICE And Avaya Extend Global Alliance

**NICE Systems Ltd.** ([news - alert](#)) and **Avaya Inc.** ([quote - news - alert](#)) recently announced the expansion of their global relationship to encompass the distribution of workforce management software from IEX Corp., a subsidiary of NICE. According to the companies, the decision to extend the long-term distribution agreement between NICE and Avaya to include the IEX TotalView Workforce Management system is based upon their shared vision for delivering a comprehensive suite of applications that addresses the full spectrum of contact center business issues. With the expansion of the distribution agreement, contact centers can now purchase TotalView directly from Avaya in addition to the NICE Solutions, which Avaya has been reselling since 1997.  
<http://www.nice.com> and <http://www.avaya.com>

### Witness Systems Announces Acquisitions

**Witness Systems** ([news - alert](#)) recently announced that it has acquired **Demos Solutions Consulting Group Ltd.** ([news - alert](#)) and **Exametric, Inc.**, ([news - alert](#)) two suppliers of enterprise productivity and resource planning solutions to the financial services industry. The acquisitions were forged to broaden the revenue opportunity and customer base for Witness, further extending the business value of its workforce optimization solutions from contact centers to bank branches and ultimately to other areas in the enterprise. The aggregate purchase price for both transactions is \$29 million in cash plus a potential earn-out of up to \$18 million based on the growth of the business over the next few years.  
<http://www.witness.com>

### Home Agent Company Working Solutions Acquires Advanced Data-Comm

**Working Solutions**, ([news - alert](#)) a provider of remote agent call center services, has announced the acquisition of **Advanced Data-Comm**, ([news - alert](#)) an 18-year old call center services company based in Dubuque, Iowa. ADC is a provider of outsourced sales and customer care solutions for medium to large enterprise companies that require highly skilled, educated agents to support their customer interactions.

"This is an important step in the future growth of Working Solutions and will open up new opportunities for our clients," said Tim Houline, CEO of Working Solutions. "Companies can now witness first hand how remote home agent solutions will be used to optimize facility-based call centers to increase utilization, efficiency, conversion rates and customer satisfaction ratings using industry professional agents."  
<http://www.workingsol.com>



### TouchStar Dialer Technology Helps Maximize Call Center Performance

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—Frederick Chua, CEO  
Magellan Solutions (Manila, Philippines)

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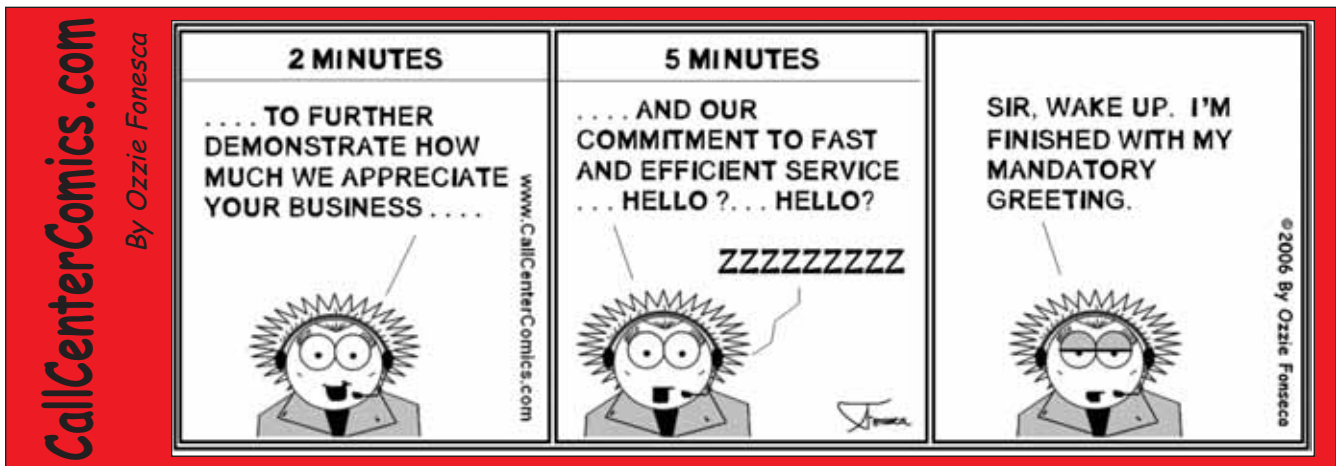
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## FrontRange Releases Upgraded IP Contact Center Solution

FrontRange Solutions ([news](#) - [alert](#)) has announced the general availability of version 5.0.3 of IP Contact Center (IPCC), the communications interaction management solution designed to provide an integrated voice communications platform that extends the functionality of other FrontRange software products, such as the HEAT Service and Support. FrontRange IPCC is now deeply integrated with HEAT, the FrontRange help desk management solution, to address many challenges at the help desk. IPCC's interoperability with HEAT means organizations now benefit from inbound call routing, customer self-service options, screen pops with prepopulated customer data with status information, after-hours service and management of shared incidents that affect multiple users. Self-service is one major enhancement to IPCC, allowing business to offer callers the option of completing a service request without needing to speak to a live service representative. <http://www.frontrange.com>



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### Aspect Announces Aspect Quality Management 2.5.1

Aspect Software, Inc. ([news](#) - [alert](#)) recently announced the general availability of Aspect Quality Management 2.5.1, a solution designed to simplify the call recording and quality management process. The latest release of Aspect Quality Management includes integration with Aspect Spectrum ACD. With this added integration, the quality management and full-time recording solution is available to all users of the Aspect Signature ACDs, including Aspect CallCenter ACD. Aspect Quality Management provides capabilities for

recording, reviewing and reporting on customer interactions, which can be used to help improve agent performance and job satisfaction, increase customer satisfaction and revenue generation, and better manage overall costs.

<http://www.aspect.com>

### NextNine Introduces Support Automation Platform For The Service Ecosystem

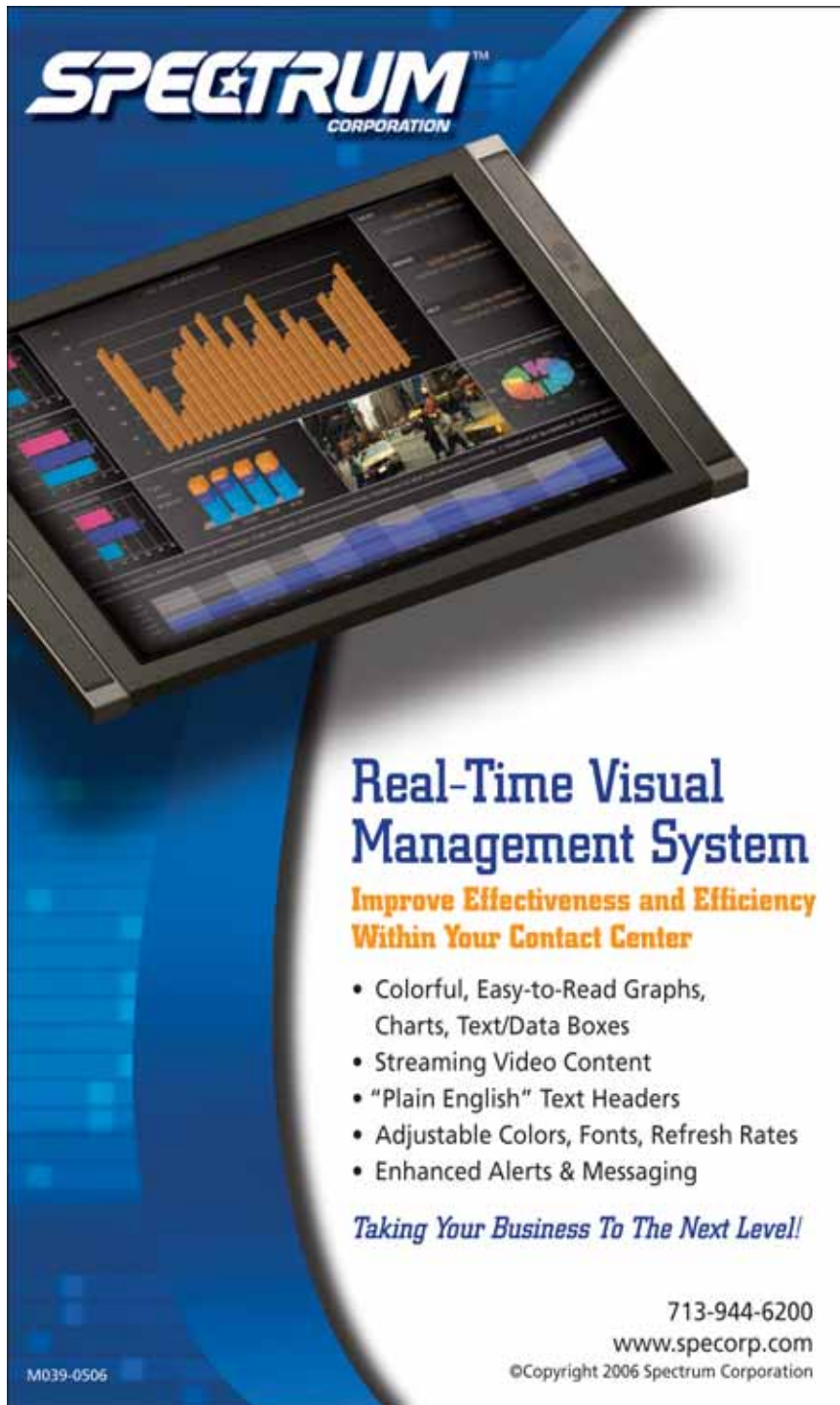
NextNine ([news](#) - [alert](#)) recently announced its NextNine Service Automation (NSA) ECOSYSTEM EDITION, which offers a suite of products and solutions and represents the evolution of the company's support automation suite. NSA Ecosystem Edition is a direct response to the growing demand across all markets, such as financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and telecommunications, for reliable, cost-effective support automation solutions. The platform is based on NextNine's patented Virtual Support Engineer and provides solutions that automate self-support, assisted support and proactive support, in addition to managed and partner service offerings.

<http://www.nextnine.com>

### AIM Technology Solution Now Rated "Avaya Compliant"

AIM Technology, ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of operational performance management software, recently announced that its AIM Performance solution is compliant with key contact center solutions from Avaya ([quote](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)). AIM Technology develops AIM Performance Suite, an enterprise application suite that optimizes and aligns the performance of agents, teams and businesses processes, transitioning call centers and other customer-facing entities from a cost center to a strategic operational asset. The application now is compliance-tested by Avaya for compatibility with the Avaya Call Management System 13.1, an application that provides the information and management tools businesses need to monitor and analyze the performance of their contact center operations.

<http://www.aimtechnology.com>



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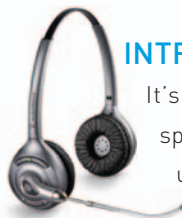
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### Syntora Acquired By Voice Print International

**Syntora, Inc.**, ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of agent performance optimization solutions for contact centers, has been acquired by a wholly-owned subsidiary of **Voice Print International**, ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of integrated interactions recording and workforce optimization solutions. The acquisition will enable Voice Print to further enhance its Activ! Performance Suite of contact center solutions, delivering integration between the interactions recording, quality monitoring, real-time performance management, speech analytics, customer surveying and automated agent coaching modules. The acquisition supports Voice Print's strategy of equipping organizations with the tools necessary to improve workforce performance, build customer loyalty, minimize risk and ensure regulatory compliance. <http://www.voiceprintonline.com>

### Persay Delivers Biometric Speaker Verification

#### For Microsoft Speech Server

**Persay**, ([news](#) - [alert](#)) a provider of biometric speaker verification technology, has announced that its VocalPassword text-dependent speaker verification platform is available as an add-on to **Microsoft** ([quote](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)) Speech Server 2004 R2 (MSS) and the next version of Speech Server, which was recently renamed Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 Speech Platform Services. Several MSS solution providers have already deployed Persay's VocalPassword as part of their MSS-based password-reset solutions in the security and healthcare industries, providing two-factor authentication. The additional security layer provided by VocalPassword enables MSS's customers to deploy voice applications that provide secure and convenient access to private and sensitive information as well as risky transactions. Independent of language and accent, VocalPassword verifies a speaker's identity using a simple pass phrase, offering a secure, convenient and efficient alternative to traditional forms of verification. VocalPassword's platform is based on .NET technology and exposes Web service (SOAP) APIs that make integration with MSS seamless and straightforward. <http://www.persay.com>

### CTI Group Announces Hosted VoIP Call Recording Solution

**CTI Group** ([news](#) - [alert](#)) has released SmartRecord IP, a Web-based call recording solution designed to enable service providers to deliver an improved contact center solution as well as facilitate legal and regulatory recording scenarios, according to the company. As contact centers become increasingly distributed and begin to leverage the benefits of hosted VoIP services, CTI Group's SmartRecord IP will help them drive efficiency, automation and distributed workforce management into their communications infrastructure. CTI Group's hosted call recording service enables service providers to offer this mission-critical feature to their customers as an enhanced service; the customer does not have to tie up precious capital in hardware or software, further eliminating risk of technology that becomes obsolete. <http://www.ctigroup.com>



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# 2006 Recommended Vendor List

## The TMC Seal Of Approval

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

### CRM/Contact Center Software/Hardware

#### Amcat



#### Co-Nexus, Inc.



#### etalk



#### IEX Corporation



#### Interactive Intelligence



#### Oracle



#### Left Bank Solutions



#### NICE Systems



#### Nortel Networks



#### Stratasoft, Inc.



#### Strategic Contact Solutions, Inc.



#### Verint Systems



#### Witness Systems



#### Sennheiser Electronic Corp.



#### SER Solutions Inc.



#### Symon



#### Spectrum Corporation



### Teleservices Outsourcing

#### West Corporation



#### InfoCision Management Corporation



#### Advanced Data-Comm, Inc.



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

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## IntelliCast™ Turns The Science Of Outbound Notification To Art

**A**utomated interactive notifications have garnered a lot of interest in the contact center industry as of late — the primary reason is that live outbound agent service is expensive and may cost more per transaction than is gained by the outbound call.

Additionally, in highly competitive markets where customer satisfaction is paramount to minimize customer churn and maximize revenue, interactive notifications are an inexpensive yet effective way for a company to proactively communicate with their customer base. This proactive communication not only helps strengthen the customer relationship, but will also help minimize more

expensive calls to the customer contact center. There are many different ways companies can leverage interactive notifications today.

For example, payment reminders or collections work for small balances is often avoided in the live agent environment, as the cost of the call may exceed the potential gain. Imagine that a large company has 100,000 customers with outstanding debt of \$20 each. Should 100 percent of that debt be collected, the company would gross \$2 million. However, the cost to use outbound live agents might exceed \$20 per call, thereby causing the company to abandon the project as unprofitable. An automated campaign

can intelligently initiate automated outbound contact to customers with outstanding debt and gently remind them that their payment is due. Because the system is interactive, the customer is also provided with the ability to pay with a credit card at a fraction of the live agent rate per call. This can lead to a very high projected return on a small investment.

In addition to collections, interactive outbound notification is also useful in many other horizontal types of applications such as appointment confirmations and reminders, prescription reminders, benefits confirmations, utility outages, political messages, employee scheduling, security and





safety alerts and a host of others for which live outbound service is either not possible, not desirable or not economical. The West IntelliCast product specifically addresses these growing market needs.

### Multichannel Support

Just as with inbound customer contact, consumers have preferred methods of receiving notifications. IntelliCast is a multichannel solution and is able to deliver messages via landline and wireless voice, short messaging (SMS) or e-mail to handheld devices including PDAs, wireless phones and two-way pagers, to an e-mail inbox or a fax machine.

The IntelliCast interactive voice platform can deliver over 400,000 customized voice messages per hour. In addition, the notifications platform can also support over 14 million e-mail/pager notifications per day, and over 3,000 fax pages per hour. The power of the IntelliCast solution is that it combines industry feature functionality with robust campaign management and reporting flexibility. This combination provides businesses with the ability to build custom campaigns that reach customers more rapidly, with greater efficiency and at a lower cost than other traditional notification methods.

### The "Art" Of Customizable Options

Using IntelliCast, companies with outbound notification needs can customize, manage, create and execute notifications based on their unique objectives and business rules, via a secure and easy graphical user interface (GUI). IntelliCast allows companies to set business rules and create and change notification content and contact strategies. Users can instantly create notification groups and upload call recipient lists via an intuitive, Web-based interface, or through batch or real-time data feeds.

IntelliCast offers custom dialing rules to allow companies to tailor every aspect of a campaign, including delivery priority, response options and escalation configurations to maximize customer contact. The

solution offers advanced answering machine detection technology and can deliver different messages based on whether the call is picked up by a live person or an answering machine. Users can manage device preferences, delivery logic and "follow me" rules that specify sequential contact attempts for multiple devices. IntelliCast offers retry logic, which can be specified for network intercepts, busy signals and unanswered numbers, including attempts, intervals and expiration rules. The solution allows users to customize caller I.D. listings with phone number or client name to maximize customer awareness of the calling party.

### Two-Way Interactivity

There are many outbound notification solutions on the market designed to merely play a recorded message or send an automated e-mail. While this can be helpful in some cases, it is a very static process. The communication travels one way only, and customers, should they wish to take further action, must be relied upon to make contact with the organization at some future time, lowering the chances for transaction completion.

IntelliCast is fully interactive; customers have the opportunity to complete a transaction or transfer to a live agent for more help or additional information on the spot, raising the likelihood of call resolution within the automated system. Campaigns can be fully automated or integrated with intelligent routing platforms to live agent contact centers or other alternative communication channels, as required.

The solution offers tools to make the notification truly interactive, including:

- Right Party Connect, which authenticates the intended call recipient to improve the customer experience and avoid fraud, and verification methods including capture of unique security codes and/or identity confirmation via biometric voice authentication (speaker verification).

- Advanced Speech Recognition. IntelliCast supports advanced speech technology (in both English and Spanish, with the ability to support another 26 languages if necessary) for voice-to-text conversion to enhance customer interaction and self-service.

- Text-to-Speech Services: IntelliCast offers the capability to convert textual information into speech that closely resembles the natural human voice. Custom dictionaries ensure audibility and proper pronunciation of names, abbreviations and acronyms. The integration of text-to-speech and CRM databases delivers unique customer treatments via personalized messages.

### Real-Time Reporting And Analytics

Because in today's call center reporting and analytics are equally as important as the customer interaction themselves, IntelliCast offers both. Real-time campaign reports allow users to track their progress. Information management tools provide timely online desktop reporting that is organized around business results and presented as executive dashboards. Historical summaries are also available and customized reports can be provided via West Interactive's secure data warehouse.

Users also have access to detailed campaign analytics for program tuning and insight into customer behavior and preferences. Call disposition reports can check time stamp records for each call delivery; confirm live answers and answering machines reached; review transfer rates, survey results and data collection reports; and verify status of busy/unanswered numbers, SIT and fax tones.

IntelliCast is based on open industry standards and is supported by three geographically dispersed and fully redundant data centers. **CIS**

*(news - alert) For more information, call 800-841-9000 and visit <http://www.west.com>.*



# Are There Suitable/ Affordable/Adequate Technologies For Small To Medium- Sized Call Centers?



For telemarketing organizations in the small to medium-sized category, there are two very distinct technological issues that can prove to be obstacles. First, there are very few solutions directed at the teleservices space. In many instances, organizations are trying desperately to customize CRM solutions to attempt to turn them into teleservices solutions. Simply put, it just doesn't work.

Another obstacle is that organizations are faced with the high costs of equipment, software, implementation and training. Not only is this unacceptable to large organizations, but it is disastrous to small to medium-sized organizations. This roadblock leads to tremendous costs, lengthy implementation time and a lack of productivity, which leads to even higher costs due to lost revenue.

TeleMarketingKey (<http://www.tele-marketingkey.com>), a provider of telemarketing solutions and software, designs and develops solutions for all sizes of call centers, catering primarily to small and medium-sized organizations that require technology that both enables their agents to perform their duties and allows management to monitor and supervise the organization.

Glenn Platkin, vice president and co-founder, recently spoke to TMCnet about TeleMarketingKey. Glenn provided his executive insight on the telemar-

keting industry and how TeleMarketingKey is speaking to some of the challenges.

**MA:** Tell us about TeleMarketingKey. How long have you been in business? What prompted the launch of TeleMarketingKey?

**GP:** We are an established solution, just releasing version 4.4, with hundreds of clients and thousands of users worldwide. Our clients range from mortgage and insurance companies, duct cleaners, health insurance providers, survey/poll takers and even charities, all the way to multinational organizations managing their in-house telemarketing group.

**MA:** Why TeleMarketingKey?

**GP:** Because there is a screaming need for it. It is probably the most under-

served market out there. It's a confused, frustrated and fast-paced market. Our clients and prospects need a solution, but don't have the time or resources to seek it out, nor the budgets to license and implement them. We're here to relieve that frustration and provide that solution that they are looking for both timely and economically.

**MA:** Can you tell us more about TeleMarketingKey's telemarketing solution? Is it a hosted solution?

**GP:** We offer both a hosted version (or, as we call it, "TMS-as-a-service") as well as "TMS on-premises." We find that many organizations have the resources and requirements to maintain the system in-house. However, there is a growing group that prefers (or needs) to subscribe to a service that will provide all the software, hardware, security, backups and availability. These companies want to be free to do what it is they're in business to do: telemarket. In their business, volume is everything and time, resources and costs have a direct impact on volume.

**MA:** What are some of the key features of the TMS system?

By Michelle Amodio  
TMCnet Associate Editor

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**Dirigosoft**



GP: Some of the more attractive points about TMS is that there are no add-on modules to purchase. Everything comes complete in the system, including:

- Automatic dialing capabilities;
- Advanced/interactive scripting, questionnaires and call guides;
- Stock control/inventory, sales order processing;
- Appointment scheduling;
- Real-time management dashboard;
- Report writing (with many canned reports);
- “Do not call” support; and
- Multilingual capabilities.

In addition, the system is very open and can easily be integrated into any other application that is being used.

MA: What do you see as the number one issue or opportunity facing purchasers of telemarketing solutions today?

GP: Sadly, there are still a lot of organizations making phone calls by hand, going sequentially down the local telephone book and using post-it notes for leads and follow-ups. These people are not technology-adverse, but their business requires volume and they can't be bothered trying solution after solution or even worse, trying to ram the wrong tool into the wrong place. It just makes things worse.

MA: How is TeleMarketingKey addressing this issue?

GP: TMS has been designed and developed, from scratch, specifically for the telemarketing industry. We have hundreds of clients who have built their organizations around us. They have given us feedback and enhancement requests over the years to make the solution better. Out-of-the-box, a new TMS client can be up and running with their own data in 20 minutes and immediately productive. It's something that companies can easily license at a reasonable cost with a full suite of features and functionality, quickly implement, deploy and be immediately productive.

MA: ROI justification is a big deal to many companies. How does TeleMarketingKey prove to be an ROI success?

GP: Everyone measures ROI differently. It can be measured by low software license fees, quick implementation/deployment time, low cost of ownership or as simply as agents and management being productive within minutes of installation. But I think it is best when we hear people tell us that:

- “When we coupled the automatic dialer with the scripting feature, productivity more than doubled.”
- “We were able to add more agents now that we have a way to manage them.”
- “Generated xx more qualified leads this week, a new record.”
- “Closed xx more sales this month, a new record.”
- “We have better control/insight into operations.”
- “Using TMS' interactive scripting, we are able to hire lower-cost, entry-level agents.”
- “We can now manage our work-at-home agents.”

MA: Who are your main competitors?

GP: We are finding a lot of companies are going with “auto-dialers,” which in many states are illegal (due to do-not-call legislation and new privacy laws), and the very expensive “predictive dialers” — you know, when you get an “out of area” on your caller I.D., you answer and nobody is on the other end, because it called five other people at the same time and you weren't the first to answer? That's always fun. We also find a lot of folks stretching and pulling on CRM. CRM plays a very important role for managing relationships with customers. We are trying to facilitate the generation of leads and prospects. It is an entirely different paradigm. In fact, the output of TMS is the input to CRM.

MA: What mistakes do companies make with telemarketing solutions implemen-

tations? How is TeleMarketingKey speaking to these?

GP: Basically, companies choose the wrong tool to remedy a problem, or they spend too much time, resources and money chasing the wrong solution. We provide a solution that is software-based, will work with your existing phone system (even SIP-based systems and/or [Vonage \(quote - news - alert\)](#) and [Skype \(news - alert\)](#).) It is feature-rich and easy to license, implement, deploy and use.

MA: Looking to the future, what is the biggest change you see on the telemarketing solution horizon?

GP: We are seeing a few things. First, laws are getting stricter regarding people's privacy. To comply with these new and evolving laws (with severe penalties), telemarketing groups can no longer make arbitrary calls from a phone book or a purchased list. They must comply with federal, state and local restrictions. The only way to guarantee immediate and consistent compliance is through automation.

Additionally, more companies are outsourcing their telemarketing functions. When you think of outsourcing, you immediately think overseas. We're seeing a lot of that, especially in India, Canada, Mexico and the Philippines. But, we're also seeing a lot of distributed and part-time agents domestically. We are seeing a lot of stay-at-home parents making calls during their free time, professionals getting home after a day at the office and adding revenues to a side business or extra income from a free-lance telemarketing role; again, it's very important that these people have the tools necessary to be productive, especially in remote locations, and that management can monitor their efforts and progress. **CIS**

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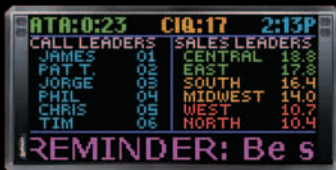
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# Evaluating The Home Agent Model

It's November, which means this is the time of year editors start thinking about their end-of-the-year wrap-ups. We start to think about "themes." While not wanting to be so predictable as declaring 2006 "The Year of Something-Or-Other," as any subset of the tech industry is too complicated to be summed up in a single sound bite, it's nice to reach into the mix occasionally and pull out the biggest and most important bits and talk about their significance.

We started hearing about the home agent model just a few years ago (though some companies, including [West Corp.](#), [\(quote - news - alert\)](#) have been practicing the model for many years). At first, some industry players considered it to be a novelty. IP contact center technology, the great enabler of the home agent model, was at first positioned to be merely money savings for long-distance costs. It wasn't long after that we began hearing about the other benefits an all-IP call center could offer. Distributed call centers, rather than one mega center, allowed companies to "follow the sun" in their customer service. IP contact center technology also allowed company management to check the call center stats anytime and anywhere. It enabled outsourcers to allow their clients to check on a customer service campaign's status at any time, even listen in on calls. Companies could take advantage of cheaper real estate and labor markets, not to mention more advantageous labor pools. Couple the advent of IP call center technologies with the explosion in home broadband adoption rates, and it wasn't long after

that we began hearing about successful home agent programs in the mainstream business news.

Some people in the industry considered it an outlandish prospect at the time, not understanding that the home agent would be logged into the call center's telephony systems, workforce management software, CRM, reporting, etc., not out mowing the lawn or washing the car, and that their progress would be just as easy to monitor as any on-premises agent who drove to the call center each day.

It was not long after that the concept of offshoring customer care roared into the general public's psyche (thanks, Lou Dobbs) and companies with large customer bases got used to the idea of call center agents being located "somewhere else." Still...the largest traditional telecommunications agencies, both domestic and foreign, have been somewhat slow to pick up the concept. Only five companies in the 2006 "Top 50 Teleservices

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



Agencies Ranking," a list prepared every year by *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine, reported using home agents.

There are a few companies, however, that recognized the potential of the home agent model long ago; these companies (and their customers) have been consistently reaping the benefits of this admirable concept.

Golden, Colorado-based Alpine Access, a provider of outsourced inbound customer care, employs more than 7,500 home-based agents. (This is a point of pride for Alpine Access, as many of its competitors offer independent contractors for their home agent programs. By contrast, all 7,500 of Alpine Access' agents are company employees who receive benefits.) Organizations such as J. Crew, Office Depot, 1-800 FLOWERS and the IRS are among Alpine Access' portfolio of customers.

Alpine Access' CEO, Chris Carrington, told me that since the home agent concept has entered the public's consciousness, the growth of both the pool of potential applicants and the companies seeking call center services via the model has been astonishing. Last year, in 2005, Alpine Access received an average of 1,000 agent job applications per week. This year, the number is closer to 2,000 per week, which translates to more than 80,000 applications thus far



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in 2006. Because of the sheer number of applications received, Alpine Access is in the enviable position of being able to pick and choose the very best applicants: the company hires approximately two percent of the total applicants.

As a result, said Carrington, the company has been able to assemble a much more highly educated, mature and experienced workforce than a traditional call center. The average age of an Alpine Access call center agent is 39, as opposed to an average age of about 23 in traditional brick-and-mortar call centers. The education stats on these employees is impressive, as well: more than 75 percent of Alpine Access' agents have at least some college (eight percent has post-graduate degrees). Carrington states that it's more than just demographics: intelligent, trained agents who are content with their jobs make the very best agents. "One of the great success factors we have found is that happy agents make happy customers," said Carrington. "Good home agents enjoy and are passionate about their jobs."

Teleservices giant West Corp., which offers a program called West at Home, finds similar education and maturity statistics with the independent contractors it uses as home agents. Over 80 percent of West at Home agents have some college education, compared to a national average of 34 percent in traditional brick-and-mortar call centers. The company estimates that these higher quality agents help increase sales conversions by 15 percent and provide a 10 percent increase in quality against key performance indicators.

The extensively large pool of applications for each available home agent job allows providers of home agent services to be exceptionally choosy. The result is an educated, motivated, articulate and skilled pool of call center agents. Home agents tend to be considerably older, on average, than brick and mortar-based agents. This is desirable, because agent maturity leads to far lower turnover than can be found in the call center industry at large, reduced training costs, higher quality customer service and better customer loyalty.

#### Security And Other Concerns

At the dawn of the home agent model, there was an oft-cited perception that such a program was unworkable because of distance, a lack of hands-on management and the inability provide in-person training. Alpine Access' Carrington stated that increasingly, that impression appears to be dissipating. "We're seeing more clients becoming comfortable with the idea. There's been a progression in call centers. First, there were in-house call centers, then service outsourced within the U.S., then call centers outsourced offshore. I think companies have become comfortable with not being able to see and touch their agents. Work at home agents are not halfway around the world. In a way, companies see it as gaining control over their outsourcing," said Carrington.

Security is one of the greatest concerns companies have when contemplating using a home agent provider. Says Mark Frei, senior vice president, West Corporation, "This [security] is probably the biggest concern for most companies, especially those in industries with regulatory issues such as financial services and insurance. West maintains a highly secure environment in all of its operations by using SSL encryption in all transactions. We have built multiple firewalls to ensure that agents can never access or manipulate databases that are resident at West or a client location, and we have extended all of these security measures to our home agent system, making these operations as secure as traditional call center operations."

Given a recent spate of news snippets detailing data theft in India and other offshore locations, it's possible the home agent model, which keeps U.S.-based agents under the control of U.S. companies and does not allow home agents access to information they do not need, it's probable that security-conscious companies will find more, not less, comfort over security issues utilizing home-based agents rather than with offshore outsourced programs.

#### "Right Shoring"

For many companies, the home agent model is a component of what the

industry is increasingly starting to call "right shoring," or choosing a combination of domestic in-house, home agent, near shore and offshore outsourcing to create the optimum balance. Convergys Corp embraces the "right shoring" model. The company will evaluate labor markets and costs, consider the political climates both domestic and abroad and complete for clients a detailed financial and risk analysis in addition to customer, operational and technical impact analyses. This information is combined with corporate marketing and customer management goals to create a recommended sourcing model, including detailed implementation plans.

In other words, for companies not wild about offshore outsourcing, for patriotic reasons, quality reasons or both, the home agent model, as one component or all of a "right shoring" program, is increasingly being seen as a cost-effective, high-quality answer to offshore outsourcing.

The Telework Coalition (TelCoa) is a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization that addresses all types of mobile and home agent scenarios. Chuck Wilsker, President and CEO of TelCoa, agrees about the benefits and the model's potential to take some of the business traditionally lost to offshore outsourcing. "The many benefits of using [home] agents include much greater retention, an expanded labor pool, higher morale, increased quality and productivity, lower costs — especially real estate and related expenses — more flexibility to immediately respond to changing customer needs, and the ability to be prepared in the event of business disruptions caused by weather, illness such as the avian flu and acts of terror. These benefits are a major reason why we have seen such a significant growth in the home agent segment of the industry. Whether looking at an outsourced or insourced model, this is a wonderful way to not only keep these jobs in America, but also bring home many of those that have gone offshore," said Wilsker.

#### Training And Evaluation

For most companies that provide home agent services, agent training is

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In keeping with tradition, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*® magazine will be presenting its 14th-Annual MVP (Marketing Via Phone) Quality Awards in the February 2007 issue, and its 22nd-Annual Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Rankings in the March 2007 (outbound) and April 2007 (inbound) issues.

### Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking

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 1, 2005 through October 31, 2006. To qualify for inclusion in the Top 50, agencies must answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes. See application for full details.

The final deadline is January 22, 2007.

Download the Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking Application, visit <http://www.tmcnet.com/368.1>

### MVP Quality Awards

MVP Quality Award winners exemplify the search for excellence. Through extensive essays, companies must demonstrate to the editors of *Customer Inter@ction Solutions*® their ability to build a feeling of community within their companies, while providing the best they can give to their clients. See application for full details.

The final deadline is January 8, 2007.

Download the application at <http://www.tmcnet.com/369.1>

supplied remotely, just as the agents' services are.

Working Solutions refers to itself as the largest professional independent agent community in the world, with some 36,000 independent home agents. The company, based in Plano, Texas, states that its agent attrition averages less than 10 percent, an astonishing figure in the call center industry. Training is done remotely. Working Solutions' Distance Learning OnDemand engages the agent in action-oriented learning methods that require a high degree of interaction and participation.

With regards to Alpine Access' hiring procedures, Carrington stated, "Like the job, the hiring process is completely virtual. It's a simple three-step process. The first step, the candidate applies online and fills out a tech evaluation that is scored by the system. If the candidate passes that, they go to the second step, a voice audition that we record and listen to. If the candidate passes that, they have a person-to-person interview over the phone. It's a quick process. It's one of the reasons we can get through over 80,000 applications."

West's Mark Frei describes his company's hiring process. "The hiring process is completely online with interviews taking place on the phone. Applicants take a qualifying test and undergo a thorough background check. In terms of any special qualities, our HR professionals are looking for self-starters who are also good communicators. HR is also able to put geographic or previous experience focus on hiring that would probably not be possible if locked into a specific site location. This is evidenced by the fact that West has home agents in all 50 states. We've found this to be more effective than a 'switch' based solution, which restricts hiring to a certain physical location in a single city. Incidentally, our HR costs have been reduced because other than the interviews, our hiring process is fully automated."

Most home agent providers have rigorous training process in place that were specifically designed for their home agents. With the inability to provide

classroom training, these companies have had to get creative, providing training via a combination of video programs, e-learning, simulations, remote coaching and customized certification programs. Most of the providers' programs allow for continuous evaluation and cross-training to be sure agents remain committed to providing high-quality service. (Readers can view Convergys' checklist for potential applications to its home agent program at <http://www.tmcnet.com/390.1> for details and frequently asked questions.)

Home agents are paid in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier, Alpine Access home agents are company employees. Other providers pay their contractors in a variety of ways, including a rate per talk minute. As an example, Convergys pays agents an average of 20 cents per talk minute, though rates will vary by the complexity of the program, as will the required minimum number of hours worked. Contractors are responsible for taking care of their own taxes.

## Scaling Up, Scaling Down

One of the great benefits of the home agent model is how quickly it can scale to meet clients' needs, which can often be quite cyclical — by season, by month or even by day, depending on a company's business. Alpine Access is able to scale intraday between 30 to 50 percent within just minutes' notice. The West at Home program estimates 40 percent staffing flexibility in the same time-frame. Should needs spike due to a marketing campaign, a commercial, or even an outage or technical problem, home agent providers can take steps to quickly bring agents online who are not currently scheduled. This allows client companies to scale their call center resources by many hundreds of percentage points in just weeks or months.

Home agent provider Working Solutions' CEO Tim Houline explained it this way. "Much like the supply chain process leveraged by auto and PC manufacturers, the remote home agent industry provides specific agents on a 'just in time' basis to meet the inevitable

## Home Agent Service Providers

Alpine Access  
(<http://www.alpineaccess.com>)  
ARO Contact Center  
(<http://www.callcenteroptions.com>)  
Convergys Corp.  
(<http://www.convergys.com>)  
West Corp. (<http://www.west.com>)  
Willow CSN (<http://www.willowcsn.com>)  
Working Solutions Inc.  
(<http://www.workingsol.com>)

spikes in demand that come for products and services, while profiling agents to closely meet their specialization requirement. Companies can save money and increase customer satisfaction by outsourcing their calls centers to providers who leverage industry professional home agents."

LiveOps, based in Palo Alto, California, says that via its LiveOps platform, any client can ramp a virtual contact center from 10 agents to more than 400 agents within 10 minutes. As a result, LiveOps can handle any volatility in call volume, with only a 1.5 percent abandon rate. The company calls its LiveOps Live Agent service "America's largest private network of independently contracted home-based agents, with over 7,000 active agents located across the 48 contiguous states." The company also provides the suite of contact center solutions used by its agents. (This is a common occurrence in the home agent model: many providers have developed their solutions internally to meet the specific needs of the home agent process, not having found exactly what they need in the call center solutions marketplace.)

LiveOps explains its exact process as follows: When a consumers dials one of LiveOps customers' phone numbers, the 800 number for the specific product or service for which the person is calling is immediately recognized. The call becomes a digital signal, or VoIP call, and is routed to the first available agent who has historically performed well with calls for that product. The call is switched back to a traditional phone signal, and a script pops up on the agent's home computer as his or her phone begins ringing. The agent answers the phone, reads the script and helps the customer through the call. If



the caller has questions not answered in the script, the agent has many other places to find the answer, including a comprehensive FAQ list, real-time chat with agents, and community forums. Agents have all the tools necessary to make each customer call a success, rendering the quality of customer service equal to that of a traditional contact center.

Tim Houlne of Working Solutions reflects on where the industry is today and where it has come from. "Ten years ago, the high-speed Internet connections we rely on today were still in development. And the support technology, compared to what it is today, was absolutely Byzantine. People told us the remote agent concept was still that; and we would fail because the service quality we needed to deliver was impossible because the technology had not yet caught up to the dream."

Said Houlne, "Employing high quality agents has become a basic requirement for today's more selective corporate buyers who understand long-term customer loyalty and value." *[Editor's note: Look for strong growth in the near future for Working Solutions. In the early autumn, the company announced its purchase of Top 50 teleservices provider Advanced Data-Comm.]*

In these days of strong emphasis on the quality of customer care (at least in the press releases of many companies, whether in reality or not), cost is still important. West estimates that its West at Home program can reduce per call costs by 10 to 15 percent while simultaneously offering a 10 percent increase in agent productivity over traditional brick and mortar call centers.

In January of 2006, analyst group IDC issued a report predicting strong growth for "homeshoring." At the time of the study, IDC estimated that there were 112,000 home-based phone representatives in the U.S. By 2010, IDC predicts that number could triple and reach over 300,000 as companies increasingly develop and invest in home-based agents, either with their own employees or by hiring out-sourcers.

## Case Study: Effective Staffing For Fluctuating Call Volume

In 1998, West Corp. approached ShopNBC, an upscale TV and Internet retailer, about outsourcing order calls for products featured on their programs. West learned that the shopping network needed a customer contact provider that could maintain adequate staffing levels and effectively handle the highly variable call volume generated by the network's programming.

Further, ShopNBC wanted a contact center that could manage the call volume with the expertise of a dedicated call environment. Achieving those goals would require efficient staffing and scheduling systems, and agents who had product knowledge and proficient communication skills.

After analyzing ShopNBC's needs and objectives, West determined that the client would benefit best from a blended solution of West at Home agents and call center-based agents. West at Home is West's work-at-home agent program that provides companies with extreme staffing flexibility and highly educated agents at a cost that is lower than traditional call center fees. By blending the West at Home and call center agents, West is able to quickly adjust staffing levels to meet their demand, making it possible to answer more calls and maximize sales conversions for the shopping network.

To ensure an exceptional level of service for ShopNBC's customers, a customized training program was developed for both home-based and traditional agents. Through this program, West was able to quickly train its agents throughout the country and provide them with the information they needed to effectively take incoming orders related to the shopping network's numerous product offerings, which include jewelry, consumer electronics, home goods, apparel, cosmetics and more.

To better process ShopNBC's variable call volume, West utilized their proprietary staffing and scheduling system, Spectrum, which allowed West to more quickly and efficiently adjust staffing levels to meet the shopping network's changing demands for agents.

West's scheduling flexibility and staffing systems made it possible to quickly, efficiently and consistently deliver results, which met ShopNBC's highly variable demand for agents. As an example, when ShopNBC's hourly call volume exceeded projections, West was able to immediately ramp up by increasing the number of West at Home agents that were available to answer calls received by the shopping network. As a result, West at Home agents were able to handle 40 to 60 percent of ShopNBC's call volume, which at times exceeded hundreds of calls per hour. In this case, West's staffing flexibility and rapid response was key to helping ShopNBC acquire more customers and increase revenue.

"Over time, offshore outsourcing of customer care will be associated more and more with its neglected sibling, homeshoring," said Stephen Loynd, senior analyst for IDC's CRM and Customer Care BPO service. "Ironically, outsourcing will therefore be associated not only with the offshoring of U.S. jobs, but also with the expansion of employment opportunities in the U.S. Offshoring's underestimated sibling, homeshoring, is about to hit a growth spurt."

Given that offshore outsourcing for voice calls can often be a one-way trade-off: the reduction in costs is bought and paid for by a reduction in quality either because of heavy accents, cultural disconnects or just negative perception, a new call center model that offers more knowledgeable, mature agents effecting improved customer service for a reduction in overhead can mean only one thing: from the home agent model, we've seen only the tip of its iceberg. **CIS**

# Who's Who In Teleservices



Once again, the editors of *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* have compiled what is one of our top five most popular and requested resources: the annual Teleservices Agencies Who's Who listing. To make this a highly valuable tool, we've kept it as simple as possible, to present a large array of companies, many of whose services can be custom fitted to suit your outsourcing needs to a tee.

We invite you to peruse these companies' Web sites and read about their professional services, both domestic and abroad. In an economic climate such as this, there is only one rule for certain: You can't afford to put your customer service into the hands of amateurs.

That said, we are happy to present the listing.

## KEY:

- A. Inbound
- B. Outbound
- C. Multilingual Services
- D. Interactive (IVR)
- E. E-mail capabilities
- F. Text chat

**1 2 1 Direct Response**  
Philadelphia, PA  
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e-mail: [plautj@121directresponse.com](mailto:plautj@121directresponse.com)  
Web: <http://www.121directresponse.com>  
Services: A, B, D, E

**24-7 Intouch**  
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Web: <http://www.24-7intouch.com>  
Services: A, C, D, E, F

**ACP Interactive, LLC**  
San Francisco, CA  
Web: <http://www.acpinteractive.com>  
Services: D

**ACS, Inc.**  
Dallas, TX  
e-mail: [info@acs-inc.com](mailto:info@acs-inc.com)  
Web: <http://www.acs-inc.com>  
Services: A, C, D, E, F

**Advanced Data-Comm, a Working Solutions Company**  
Dubuque, IA  
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e-mail: [mbudde@advanced-data.com](mailto:mbudde@advanced-data.com)  
Web: <http://www.advanced-data.com>  
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Web: <http://www.alertcom.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Services: A, B, C, D, E

**Alpine Access**  
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Web: <http://www.alpineaccess.com>  
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**AnswerNet Network**  
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Web: <http://www.answernet.com>  
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**APAC Customer Services, Inc.**  
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Web: <http://www.apaccustomerservices.com>  
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Services: A, B, C, D

**Archway Marketing Services**  
Rogers, MN  
Web: <http://www.archway.com>  
Services: A, C, D, E

**ARO, Inc.**  
Kansas City, MO  
e-mail: [sales@callcenteroptions.com](mailto:sales@callcenteroptions.com)  
Web: <http://www.callcenteroptions.com>  
Services: A, B, C, E

**B2B Lead Machine, Inc.**  
Mesa, AZ  
Web: <http://www.b2bleadmachine.net>  
Services: B, E

**CallNet Call Center Services, Inc.**  
Bloomington, IN  
Web: <http://www.callnetservices.com>  
Services: A

**CanTalk Canada Inc.**  
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e-mail: [info@cantalk.com](mailto:info@cantalk.com)  
Web: <http://www.cantalk.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E

**Center Partners, Inc.**  
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Web: <http://www.centerpartners.com>  
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Nashville, TN  
Web: <http://www.clientlogic.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**The Connection Outsourced Call Center**  
Burnsville, MN  
e-mail: [sales@the-connection.com](mailto:sales@the-connection.com)  
Web: <http://www.the-connection.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Connexions Inc.**  
Orlando, FL  
Web: <http://www.connexions.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Convergys Corporation**  
Cincinnati, OH  
e-mail: [marketing@convergys.com](mailto:marketing@convergys.com)  
Web: <http://www.convergys.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Cross Country Automotive Services**  
Medford, MA  
Web: <http://www.crosscountry-auto.com>  
Services: A, B, D, E

**Crystal Call, Ltd.**  
Bratislava, Slovakia  
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Web: <http://www.crystalcall.sk>  
Services: A, B, C

**Customer Focus Services**  
Los Angeles, CA and Bangalore, India  
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Web: <http://www.customerfocusservices.com>  
Services: A, C, E, F

**Cyber City Teleservices**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E

**DialAmerica Marketing, Inc.**  
Mahwah, NJ  
Web: <http://www.dialamerica.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**DF King & Co., Inc.**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Web: <http://www.echo-services.com> or <http://www.ecdci.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D

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Web: <http://www.econnectasia.com>  
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**EMS, Inc.**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Services: A, B, C, D, E

**ePERFORMAX Contact Centers Corporation**  
Cordova, TN and Makati City, Philippines  
Web: <http://www.eperformax.com>  
Services: A, B, C

**Epixtar Corp.**  
Miami, FL  
Web: <http://www.epixtar.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E

**e-Services Group International**  
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Web: <http://www.e-servicesgroup.com>  
Services: A, B, C, E, F

**eTelecare Global Solutions**  
Scottsdale, AZ  
e-mail: [info@etelecare.com](mailto:info@etelecare.com)  
Web: <http://www.etelecare.com>  
Services: A, B, E, F

**Excell Agent Services, L.L.C.**  
Lubbock, TX  
e-mail: [sales@excellagent.com](mailto:sales@excellagent.com)  
Web: <http://www.excellagent.com>  
Services: A

**The Frantz Group**  
Grafton, WI  
Web: <http://www.thefrantzgroup.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Full Perspective Video Services, Inc.**  
Indianapolis, IN  
Web: <http://www.fpvid.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E

**GC Services Limited Partnership**  
Houston, TX  
e-mail: [marketingcommunications@gcserve.com](mailto:marketingcommunications@gcserve.com)  
Web: <http://www.gcserve.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Global Response**  
Margate, FL  
Web: <http://www.globalresponse.com>  
Service Type: A, C, D, E, F

**Hamilton Contact Center Services**  
Aurora, NE  
e-mail: [marketing@hamiltontm.com](mailto:marketing@hamiltontm.com)  
Web: <http://www.hamiltontm.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Harte-Hanks**  
San Antonio, TX  
e-mail: [contactus@harte-hanks.com](mailto:contactus@harte-hanks.com)  
Web: <http://www.harte-hanks.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E

**Help Desk NOW Inc.**  
Web: <http://www.helpdesknow.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**The Heritage Company, Inc.**  
North Little Rock, AR  
Web: <http://www.theheritagecompany.com>  
Services: A, B, E

**Hispanic Teleservices Corporation**  
Houston, TX  
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Web: <http://www.htc.to>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F





**ICT Group**  
Newton, PA  
<http://www.ictgroup.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Dublin, OH  
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e-mail: [hayley@influentinc.com](mailto:hayley@influentinc.com)  
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Services: A, B, C, E

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Web: <http://www.informed-sources.com>  
Services: B, C, D, E, F

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Web: <http://www.infovox.com.co>  
Services: A, B, D, E, F

**InPulse Response Group**  
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Web: <http://www.inpulseresponse.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**InService America**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**IntelliCare**  
South Portland, ME  
e-mail: [info@intellicare.com](mailto:info@intellicare.com)  
Web: <http://www.intellicare.com>  
Services: A, B, C

**InTouch Solutions**  
Web: <http://www.its-smartcalls.com>  
Services: B, D

**ISA Corp.**  
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Services: A, D, E

**L3 Microdyne Outsourcing**  
Torrance, CA  
Web: <http://www.microdyne.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**LiveOps, Inc.**  
Palo Alto, CA  
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Web: <http://www.liveops.com>  
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Web: <http://www.lotusdigitech.com>  
Services: A, B, E

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Services: D

**MicahTek Inc.**  
Broken Arrow, OK  
Web: <http://www.micahtek.com>  
Services: A

**Millennium Teleservices**  
Edison, NJ  
Web: <http://www.mmtel.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Mills Marketing & TeleServices, LLC**  
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Phone: 402-707-5654  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Web: <http://www.mphasis.com>  
Service: A, B, C, E, F

**NCO Group, Inc.**  
Horsham, PA  
Web: <http://www.ncogroup.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**NOVO 1, Inc.**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**O'Curran Teleservices**  
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Services: A, C, D, E

**OKS-Ameridial Worldwide**  
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Services: A, B

**Outsourcing, S.A.**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**PCCW Contact Center Business**  
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Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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Services: A, B, D, E

**Perfexa Solutions**  
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Gurgaon, India  
Web: <http://www.perfexa.com>  
Services: A, B, E, F

**Prairie Voice Services**  
Omaha, NE  
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Services: A, B, D, E, F

**Qinteraction**  
Manila, Philippines  
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Web: <http://www.qinteraction.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Selway Group, Inc.**  
Mesa, AZ  
Web: <http://www.selwaygroup.com>  
Services: A, C, D, E, F

**Servit Outsourcing**  
Bucharest, Romania  
e-mail: [contact@romsourcing.com](mailto:contact@romsourcing.com)  
Web: <http://www.romsourcing.com>  
Services: B, C, E, F

**Signius**  
Princeton, NJ  
Web: <http://www.signius.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**SITEL Corporation**  
Omaha, NE  
Contact: Jennifer Charles  
e-mail: [jennifer.charles@sitel.com](mailto:jennifer.charles@sitel.com)  
Web: <http://www.sitel.com>  
Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Soluziona Consultoria y Tecnología S.L.**  
Madrid, Spain  
Contact: Cesar Martin del Alamo  
e-mail: [cmartina@soluziona.com](mailto:cmartina@soluziona.com)  
Web: <http://www.soluziona.com>  
Services: D

**Sound Telecom**

e-mail: [info@sound-tele.com](mailto:info@sound-tele.com)  
 Web: <http://www.sound-tele.com>,  
<http://www.solaxis.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

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[bpiatkowski@source1htmt.com](mailto:bpiatkowski@source1htmt.com)  
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 Services: A, B, C, D, E

**SR. Teleperformance**

Paris, France  
 Web:  
<http://www.srteleperformance.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**The Survey Center**

Mashpee, MA  
 Web:  
<http://www.thesurveycenter.com>  
 Services: B, E

**Sykes Enterprises, Inc.**

Tampa, FL  
 Web: <http://www.sykes.com>  
 Services: A, C, D, E, F

**Synergy Solutions, Inc.**

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[lfentem@callsynergy.com](mailto:lfentem@callsynergy.com)  
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<http://www.synergysolutionsinc.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D

**Taction, The Contact Center**

Waldoboro, ME  
 e-mail: [info@taction.com](mailto:info@taction.com)  
 Web: <http://www.taction.com>  
 Services: A, B, D, E, F

**Talk2Rep Call Centers**

Tamarac, FL  
 e-mail: [sales@talk2rep.com](mailto:sales@talk2rep.com)  
 Web: <http://www.talk2rep.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F  
**TCIM Services, Inc.**  
 Wilmington, DE  
 Web: <http://www.tcim.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**TechTeam Global**

Southfield, MI  
 Web: <http://www.techteam.com>  
 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Telacquire Marketing Group Inc.**

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 Web: <http://www.telassist.com>  
 Services: A, E

**TeleDirect International, Inc.**

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 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Telelogix**

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 Web: <http://www.telelogix.biz>  
 Services: A, B, C

**TelePartners**

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**Teleperformance USA**

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<http://www.teleperformanceusa.com>  
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**Teleservices Direct**

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<http://www.telespectrum.com>  
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**TeleTech Holdings, Inc.**

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 e-mail: [info@teletech.com](mailto:info@teletech.com)  
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**TMP Direct**

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 Services: A, B, C, D, E, F

**Touchstone Communications**

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 Services: A, B

**TransData, LLC**

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 Web: <http://www.vzit.com.do>  
 Services: A, B, C, E

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 Services: A, B, C, D, E

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# Improving Customer Analytics And Reporting

There are many tools available today that perform analytics. The goal of these tools is to help organizations gather intelligence from customer transactions. They do not, however, have the capability to extract meaningful and strategic insights from customer *interactions* and combine them with insights gathered from transactional systems, which is the key to improving customer analytics and reporting.

Today there is a powerful new domain evolving for extracting insights from customer interactions: interaction analytics. Interaction analytics are driven by qualifying principles. In the past, up to and including today, the various contact center systems that have been implemented have focused solely on quantifiable customer metrics; for example, average handling time, service levels (what percentage of calls were answered within a certain time frame), etc. Interaction analytics bring an understanding of the customer experience to the next level by merging these data with qualifying metrics. For example, why did a customer become irate and how did the agent handle objections? How and why is an agent successful at identifying and closing sales opportunities? How well did he or she fare on customer feedback surveys?

The kind of input that can be derived from interaction analytics provides a strategic benefit at all levels. The contact center can better understand the performance of its agents, supervisors and the contact center overall; the organiza-

tion's marketing department can gain critical competitive insights and input regarding customer "wish lists"; the business development department can better identify and leverage new business opportunities; and more.

The key to extracting qualifying insights from customer interactions is to consolidate both quantifying and qualifying information that is extracted by as many contact center systems as possible; i.e., recording, quality monitoring, speech analytics, application screen content analysis, customer feedback, CRM, CTI and workforce management. Furthermore, the greater the number of different analytics methodologies that are applied to customer calls (for example, keyword spotting with ad-hoc query capabilities, emotion detection, talk-over analysis, speaker recognition), the easier it is to understand not only what was said, but in what way, by whom and, most important, what the implications are.

By Ilan Kor  
NICE Systems

## Interaction Analytics

The goal of improved customer analytics is to gain a deep understanding of customer behavior and be able to address a broad spectrum of key strategic issues both on the contact center and enterprise levels. These issues could be improving agent performance, streamlining coaching packages, increasing customer satisfaction, decreasing customer defection, upsell/cross-sell, ensuring compliance or preventing identity fraud.

Within the analytics realm, speech analytics (speech recognition and verification) have been used primarily by contact centers to automate and improve self-service applications and to authenticate customers automatically in an attempt to reduce transaction time, not to gain insights from the customer interaction.

But when deployed in one unified platform, speech analytics can allow contact center supervisors and decision makers to cross-reference data to gain insights into what is truly going on with their customers, their agents and in the contact center in general.







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Ideally, the interactions platform, which captures and analyzes data from customer interactions via voice channels (traditional and IP telephony), CTI and agent computer screen activity, should apply multi-dimensional analytics, which include a variety of methodologies and technologies such as those mentioned above.

#### The Importance Of Multi-dimensional Interaction Analytics

The multi-dimensional approach to interaction analytics entails compiling results from monitoring keywords and phrases, detecting the customer's emotion level, gathering input from the agent's screen activity and application events, as well as gathering input from various business systems.

This kind of approach can quickly alert managers to customers at risk of defection. For example, multi-dimensional analytics can combine input from the CRM system, where the customer's average monthly buying patterns have significantly shifted towards fewer and fewer purchases, with key phrases being uttered during calls to the contact center — phrases such as “not satisfied” or “didn't work” — along with poor customer feedback results for the handling agent. All of these can alert management to a customer about to defect, allowing the company to take steps to remedy the situation *before* the customer decides to go to the competition.

When combined with emotion detection, the benefits of interaction analytics become even more powerful. Emotion detection is a recent exciting development in speech. This new capability detects a speaker's emotional “event” — or heightened emotion, which is triggered by happiness, frustration, anger and so on. There are several features that help point to a speaker's emotional state, including voice pitch levels, speaking rate and stress distribution, among others. First, a baseline of emotion is determined during the first seconds of a call, when the speaker is least likely to be excited or frustrated. Next, the software engines pick up on any deviation from that baseline and

conclude that the speaker is in a heightened emotional state.

In the contact center, emotion detection is critical in identifying true customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and pre-empting potential defections. If a customer expresses dissatisfaction, the call can be flagged and routed to a member of the management staff. The issue will then be reviewed, and the caller will receive a callback instantaneously. This can result in unprecedented responsiveness and customer loyalty.

The traditional approach to spotting keywords and phrases also needs to be revised to improve customer analytics. The benefits of keyword spotting in monitoring the content of calls have become well known. However, this benefit is not being fully exploited when implemented as a discrete engine, separate from the recording/QM platform, as is normally done. This approach is limited in that it enables the creation of reports that can provide only statistical compilations.

Ad-hoc search capabilities can transform saved voice interactions into a searchable database by creating an index file for every recorded customer interaction. Once calls are indexed, ad-hoc queries can be performed to retrieve calls that contain keywords or phrases that were spoken at any point during the call, without having to pre-define in advance.

Another way of improving the accuracy of interaction analytics is the separate capture of the customer and agent sides of the interaction, and performing independent audio processing for each. This provides critical qualification of relevant calls. For example, through a unified approach, supervisors can verify whether the words “buy again,” as picked up by the word spotting software, signified an upsell opportunity (Customer: “I will want to buy again”) or a routine sales pitch (Agent: “Would you like to buy again?”).

#### Reporting

Improved reporting entails centralizing the results of multi-dimensional interaction analytics into unified dash-

**In the contact center, emotion detection is critical in identifying true customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and pre-empting potential defections.**

boards. This enables managers to review all the relevant and critical performance parameters of the agent, the team, the supervisor and the contact center. He or she can spot trends regarding customer satisfaction, sales targets, handling time of customers and more. The manager can then correlate exceptions and take corrective action to improve performance at all levels.

Unified dashboards support KPI-based (key performance indicators) management. Driven by organizational and individual performance objectives, this is an extremely effective management tool. The agent, for example, can receive the kind of feedback that is required for increasing motivation, feeling connected to the organization and understanding what underlies the success or deficiencies in performance.

Supervisors can answer questions such as: How are agents/teams performing relative to pre-defined objectives? Who is excelling? Who needs help? Which agents are receiving the best feedback from customers? How does the performance of my team compare with other teams? Is there a correlation between my agents' adherence to scheduling and the quality of their interactions with customers?

Furthermore, business users can answer questions related to customer and market dynamics, such as: Are my customers happy with the service they are receiving from our customer service representatives? Which products are getting the most calls? Why are customers calling in about these products more than others?





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#### A Case In Point

To illustrate the above principles, let's take, for example, the contact center of a bank's credit services division. This contact center is looking to apply advanced customer interaction analytics and receive comprehensive reports to help them increase dollars collected, ensure compliance with bankruptcy and privacy laws, and ensure high levels of customer service and satisfaction.

This requires improving each step in the collections model: being more effective in contacting the account holder; improving collection skills in securing the customer's promise to pay; getting immediate payment on the phone to increase kept promise rates; and, ultimately, increasing dollars collected.

The bank can achieve these goals by implementing a unified platform that consolidates information, applies multi-dimensional interaction analytics and generates cross-application reports. Furthermore, the implementation process should entail certain preliminary steps critical for successful deployment: business processes benchmarking and reviews, requirements definition, interaction analytics definition and tuning and further engineering where required.

This bank can best leverage the benefits of this approach by creating a customer analysis group or business interactions analysis group in addition to the traditional quality monitoring group, which performs random monitoring and focuses on standard agent skills.

This second group is comprised of a function that is new to the contact center, business interactions analysts. These analysts would perform precision monitoring, enabled through multi-dimensional interaction analytics, to focus on specific business issues and improve agent skills that have a direct impact on dollars collected per head.

Once these processes are implemented, with the proper human and technology infrastructures in place, the bank is ready

## A Luxury Item No More

*By Steve Sanden, Cincom Systems, Inc.*

If you have ever moved in with someone — whether out of undying love or a more practical need to pay the rent — you know how hard it can be to merge two sets of belongings. Suddenly, you find yourselves with two sets of furniture, two sets of silverware and two sets of TVs and remotes. How will they fit into one abode?

Most companies have felt the same way about upgrading their legacy CRM systems. What is the best way to merge your old data with any new data? And how do you collect data and report on the old and the new?

In the past, only large companies could afford to purchase an expensive new proprietary database that would convert their old data to fit new technologies. But now, smaller companies can take advantage of new streamlined systems that provide data collection and reporting capabilities and enable organizations to easily tap into their legacy customer data. Small businesses also gain the ability to anticipate customer trends and make strategic decisions. In short, what was once a luxury item for a few is now mainstream for the masses.

#### A Mountain Of Data

Most companies have no problem collecting data. IT systems that gather an impressive amount of customer data, call data and even advanced metrics have been around for years. What many smaller companies lack is the ability to put those data into readable and practical formats for better business decision-making.

Many legacy systems also fail to collect the right kind of data. For example, if a small company wants to discover where its customer calls are abandoned, an older CRM system may not be sophisticated enough to decipher whether a call was abandoned at the private branch exchange (PBX), in the customer queue or during mid-conversation.

Why does this matter? If calls are being lost in the queue, for example, the company may want to hire more CRM staff. It may also want to change its sales or support approach, since it appears to be turning off some customers.

Beyond the mass of simple statistics, the real value in gathering data is anticipating customer trends. Many smaller companies or departments don't know which metrics to study. They simply don't know where to begin climbing the mountain of data to reach some sort of business enlightenment. They are not alone.

#### New Insights From Old Data

After spending a great deal of time and money installing expensive, older CRM systems, many veteran CRM managers remain extremely frustrated. Most feel they need a Ph.D. just to run a report. Even when they can run a report, it often doesn't give them the information they need.

Many older CRM solutions also ignore the wealth of customer data sitting in a company's legacy systems. Most solutions that have bridged the gap between legacy systems and new data are also cost-prohibitive for a small or medium-sized company.

Fortunately, new solutions build a better bridge between legacy data and new, real-time data. What sets them apart from old solutions is their primary goal — to help companies get to know their customers better by easily tying old data to new information. This new, merged information is also readily available in easy-to-navigate, customizable reports.

Marrying these two data streams instantly creates new efficiencies. The new technology solutions allow CRM managers to see events and transactions across the organization for every customer. The "marriage" ties each customer's current interactions to previous transactions. Reporting on this conjoined data allows anyone to immediately understand what's going on.

These data need not sit in a report on a manager's desk. The real-time capabilities allow a CRM manager to create business rules that change the customer service or sales script based upon a customer's previous transactions. A CRM agent can instantly view previous transactions and preferences for that customer.

Each transaction can be individualized and specialized. The customers feel their unique issues are being understood, and they don't feel as if they are wasting time repeating information. Agents spend less time gathering and securing redundant data. In addition, the company's image as a responsive organization is immediately boosted.

#### The Cost Of Understanding

The technology that makes these solutions possible is now affordable for small and medium-sized companies. Many vendors offer hosted solutions, which means small companies no longer have to invest heavily in a massive IT infrastructure to compete with larger companies.

By using a hosted solution, companies use their existing IT infrastructure while leveraging the technology and experience of a vendor. The vendor houses much of the necessary processing power and data storage at a central location. Companies can access and report on their data from any PC using an easy-to-navigate, Web-based interface. Customer data remain secure, protected by the vendor's enhanced knowledge of the latest security and identity-theft-prevention measures.

Moving to a hosted solution also means that companies can open their data to access across their enterprise. Sales, marketing, customer support and purchasing can all gain new access to existing and newly generated data. Companies can establish administrative rules for which areas (or even which users) have access to certain types of data. By expanding and customizing data access, companies allow every employee to respond much more quickly to customer requests, as they can now instantly know the history and customer preferences behind each one.

A hosted solution dramatically reduces the necessary business cost of knowing your customer. More important, a good vendor provides tools to thoroughly and efficiently mine your new and legacy customer data so you can make better decisions about every aspect of your business. Even in the best marriage of data, the ability to hone knowledge about those data to make strategic choices provides the true return on investment.

#### Eliminating Barriers To Customer Retention And Growth

When you share a dwelling with someone, you may learn something shocking about that person. You may discover he or she still loves Duran Duran or is fond of teeth flossing at the table. In today's highly competitive global marketplace, those revelations — good and bad — make a company much more responsive to its customers' changing needs.

Small companies need to think and act like the big guys. A hosted CRM solution allows them to do just that. They can marry new data with legacy customer information to gain new insights into their customers. They can report more effectively on customer trends. They have resources to better understand their customer data and make strategic decisions. Putting serious analytics and reporting into the hands of any company makes bold decision-making for growth possible. **CIS**

*Steve Sanden has worked for seven years in software development utilizing technologies ranging from PHP/Perl to Java/JavaEE. He is currently a software engineer at Cincom Systems (news - alert) (<http://www.cincom.com>), working as part of the Synchrony Development Team.*

to go. By integrating business data generated by their CRM system, the bank can identify, for example, calls/customers who had terminated the service. The bank can then correlate these data to actual calls recorded with these customers. The calls are identified by a mix of high emotion detection and by picking up on words and phrases such as "I have other credit cards" or "I will close my account."

This information can then be aggregated in a report that is generated and pushed to the user's desktop to analyze all the relevant parameters; e.g., agent performance and adherence to scripts and compliance regulations, effectiveness of marketing campaigns, workflows, coaching/training, processes and more.

Another benefit of this approach is preempting customers at risk of defection. By combining keyword spotting with emotion detection, customer dissatisfaction can be assumed when high emotion is detected in conjunction with words or phrases such as, "I already told you," "lawyer," "supervisor," "manager," "I don't understand" and "How many times do I need to say?"

Consolidating customer insights generated from as many contact center data systems as possible and applying a broad variety of interactions analytics enables contact center and enterprise decision makers to improve customer analytics and reporting. This enables them to address key business issues such as driving and protecting revenue, ensuring compliance and corporate governance, nurturing customer loyalty, increasing agent productivity, improving agent negotiation skills, improving upselling and cross-selling and compiling critical business intelligence.

Ultimately, interaction analytics can improve operational efficiency and strategic effectiveness to help companies understand what is actually going on during customer interactions and, most important, *why*. **CIS**

*Ilan Kor is Senior Product Manager, Interaction Analytics with NICE Systems (news - alert) (<http://www.nice.com>).*

## Snow, Sickness And Other Aggravations: Adjusting For Daily Staffing Surprises

It's 8:10 am, and already the day's schedule needs to be fed to the shredder. Several agents have called in sick, others have been stranded by a snowstorm, a supervisor has convened an emergency meeting, and the phones are flooded because a product you're selling was mentioned on the Oprah show the day before. If you don't take action right away, you can kiss your target service levels — and maybe your job — goodbye.

While all of these calamities are unlikely to occur on the same day, any one of them can wreak havoc on a contact center's staffing plans and send analysts scrambling to adjust the schedule. That's where the real challenge begins.

Should that emergency meeting be cancelled? Should agents on the current shift be asked to work overtime, or should the next shift be asked to come in early? How should lunches and breaks be handled? If the problem is overstaffing rather than understaffing, should agents be sent home or offered voluntary time off if there is no training or other activity that can be used to fill the downtime?

For all but the smallest contact centers, the only way to answer these kinds of questions effectively is with the help of the center's workforce management software. A system with intra-day analysis capabilities can quickly refresh the forecast and recalculate the staffing scenario required to meet the center's service objectives. An intra-day schedule reoptimization utility can finish the job by electronically modifying work assignments, breaks and lunches based on the new forecast.

Performing these functions promptly and correctly can avert runaway queues,

high abandon rates, lost sales, customer irritation, an inability to meet service level agreements and a decline in agent morale. A few simple strategies can facilitate the process.

**Inform agents of your intra-day policies.** The rule of thumb here is “no surprises.” Letting the staff know they may be asked to extend a shift or otherwise adjust their schedules can go a long way toward defusing tensions and agent hostility in a crisis. If agents know what to expect when call volumes exceed forecasts or the call center is otherwise ailing, the cure will be much easier for them to swallow.

**Establish a benchmark.** Not every absent agent or variation in forecasted call volume requires an overhaul of the day's schedule. The challenge is knowing when you hit a threshold that demands action. To avoid pushing the panic button unnecessarily, call center schedulers or supervisors should set trigger levels. This can be accomplished by analyzing historical data to determine what conditions have led to excessive handle times

and related problems in the past, then determining the tipping point for key metrics such as percent over forecast.

Acceptable thresholds will vary, but most contact centers are capable of absorbing at least five percent more calls than anticipated and/or agent shrinkage of up to 10 percent before service levels start to plummet. Conversely, most can tolerate at least five percent fewer calls before needing to consider cutbacks in same-day staffing levels. Decide on your target numbers, and don't worry about intra-day schedule adjustments unless you hit them.

**Review each schedule before the live date.** Since most contact centers assemble their work schedules two to three weeks in advance, any given schedule can be affected by issues such as attrition, transfers and/or individual agents' change requests that may arise between the time the plan is created and the work day itself. Staffing problems caused by these kinds of developments can be prevented by implementing a regular review process that will detect obvious shortages or surpluses ahead of time.

Ideally, each daily schedule should be reviewed a week before and then a day before the live date. During peak seasons, it may be advisable to add a third look in the middle of the week. A quick check for deviations in agents required versus agents provided is all that's required.

Some contact centers have intra-day analysts who are dedicated to this type of work as well as ongoing monitoring



By Valarie Carbo  
Pipkins



to ensure that service levels stay on track throughout the day. If your center does not have an intra-day department, the task can be handled by your regular schedulers. Either way, the extra effort can pay off by eliminating staffing headaches or at least simplifying the intra-day adjustment process.

**Produce an intra-day forecast.** As soon as call volumes, occupancy rates, service levels or other metrics enter your pre-defined danger zones, use your workforce management software's intra-day forecasting tools to assess the potential impact on the rest of the day.

Advanced systems will be able to provide forecasts at 15- and 30-minute intervals based on current call volume. They will also be able to calculate staffing surplus or shortage levels for each interval. This is where the difference between a spreadsheet and an automated system with intra-day management capabilities begins to bear fruit.

Without workforce management software, contact center personnel would have to look at previous traffic patterns, calculate the percentage of a day's calls represented by a given half-hourly increment, divide the number of calls received in the comparable current-day increment by the appropriate percentage, and then extrapolate call volumes as well as staffing needs for each remaining interval even before attempting to fine-tune agents' schedules. The rescheduling process, of course, is another task that is difficult to execute manually for call centers much larger than 25 or 30 agents.

**Decide what to change.** Like nearly everything associated with contact center scheduling, intra-day schedule management is a juggling act that changes based on which particular balls you toss into the air. You need to decide which teams or shifts to designate for schedule adjustments, whether shifts can be lengthened or shortened, whether to cancel or add discretionary off-phone activities such as meetings and training sessions, and whether employees who are scheduled later in the day can be asked to arrive earlier.

In some cases, the answers will depend on your payroll policies or hir-

ing agreements. In others, the decision will be based on issues such as time of day. If it's early, for example, you have the flexibility to adjust later shifts if necessary. In general, it is advisable to reoptimize only staff members who are already in the building, but this can vary depending on the circumstances.

Start with the simplest options and see if they will produce the desired results. The goal is to alter the staffing plan as little as possible to avoid confusion.

You may also need to ask employees for overtime or other changes before moving forward. In that case, it is useful if your workforce management system has a means of soliciting volunteers electronically through pop-up messages or similar tools.

#### **Run a reoptimization scenario.**

Armed with the latest intra-day forecast and an idea of the kinds of staffing changes you're willing or able to make, analysts or schedulers can move on to adjusting the daily schedule to compensate for the unexpected events. The first step is to run a preliminary scenario to see how many changes would be required to align staffing with service objectives. The results will determine whether you proceed further.

If the workforce management system has a reoptimization utility, it will be integrated with relevant data such as call volume and real-time staff attendance. Typically the system can be preconfigured with rules such as which teams or shifts to include in the calculations when reoptimizing; whether overtime is an option and, if so, how much; whether scheduled meetings or training sessions should be removed; and whether to adjust lunches, breaks or both. Users can then instruct the utility to apply these rules or manually override them.

The system will then generate a new staffing plan, complete with skill set scheduling and any other capabilities used to produce the original. It will also calculate the impact on service levels and deliver the results as the percentage of calls that will be answered within your target interval.

**Accept or reject the plan.** At this point, it's time to decide whether the

pain of changing the schedule is worth the results that will be achieved.

Sometimes a simple change such as canceling a team meeting will free enough agents to cover a shortfall without making any further adjustments. Sometimes nothing you do will solve the problem because you simply don't have enough bodies to fill the seats. The numbers will tell the story immediately.

If the reoptimization process has not yielded at least a two to three percent improvement in service levels, the end may not justify the means. Analysts can run new scenarios with different sets of parameters to attempt to improve the results. Each new scenario must then be evaluated before making a final decision.

If none of the plans hits the mark, you may have no choice but to stick with the schedule you have. If the results are satisfactory, publish the plan and move forward.

**Notify agents.** The critical final step in the process involves broadcasting the schedule changes to the staff. Some workforce management systems will automatically notify agents by e-mail, pop-up or dashboard message without any interruption to call handling. Otherwise, supervisors must print and distribute new intra-day schedules and/or talk to agents individually by phone or in person.

Last-minute staffing surprises are inevitable in any contact center environment. Whether prompted by a spike in call volumes, a flu outbreak, an anomaly such as inexperienced agents who are not yet able to handle full workloads, or a variety of other factors, they are part of any call center operation. The only question is what to do about them.

Following the steps outlined above will make it easier to cope. Before you reach for the Alka Seltzer, reach for this checklist. With the right tools, intra-day schedule adjustments are just a few clicks away. **CIS**

*Valarie Carbo is a senior consultant to Pipkins, Inc. (news - alert) (<http://www.pipkins.com>), a worldwide supplier of workforce management software and services to the call center industry, and a former manager of contact center outsourcing services.*

# A Moment With CosmoCom's New President Of CosmoCom America, Ben Eisner

Unified customer communications provider CosmoCom (<http://www.cosmocom.com>) recently announced that Ben Eisner has joined the company as President of CosmoCom Americas, a new position. He will lead all of CosmoCom's operations in the region, which includes North America and CALA (Central America and Latin America).

Eisner is a veteran of the industry; he brings more than 25 years of executive-level telecom industry experience to the position, which [CosmoCom \(news - alert\)](#) created to support the rapid growth in demand for all-IP contact center products in the Americas region.

Recently, I was able to catch up with Eisner to get a feel for his outlook on the present and future of the IP contact center industry.

**TS: What in your background uniquely prepared you for this role?**

**BE:** Whenever I step into a new position, I always have the feeling that EVERYTHING in my background was preparing me for just exactly this new opportunity. And I certainly feel that way about joining CosmoCom now. I've been involved in the telecom product space for more than 25 years, and in the past decade, I've focused exclusively on the contact center. I always like to be in a high-impact position, so I have been drawn to smaller organizations, or to smaller divisions of larger companies where I had a lot of responsibility to drive growth. I'm both compatible with and complementary to the CosmoCom team. I'm compatible by background, experience and business philosophy. I'm complementary because my strength and greatest successes have always been in the U.S. market, and that is where CosmoCom is looking for me to make a difference. Although the region I am taking over has been growing right along with the whole company at a good pace, it accounts today for less than 50 percent of the company's total revenue. CosmoCom wants to see the Americas bringing at least half of its total revenue.

My personal goal is 60 percent, and I don't see any reason that I won't achieve it.

**TS:** What do you think of the Telephony@Work purchase by Oracle, and what does it mean to CosmoCom, if anything?

**BE:** Oracle's purchase of Telephony@Work is one of many signs that we are reaching the inflection point in IP contact center technology and in IT/telecom convergence, related to both the traditional premise-based space and the hosted service space. It's a disruptive sign and a harbinger of growth, aggressive competition and, we think, very good things for CosmoCom.

**TS:** How do you perceive the market has evolved over the years?

**BE:** Every new entrant to an established market has to find a foothold, grow that initial presence and leverage it to expand overall market penetration. With CosmoCom, that foothold was the shared platform hosted contact center. With its multi-tenancy and tenant self-administration, CosmoCom had a distinct advantage in that space, and it has leveraged that advantage into a commanding presence in more top-tier telcos globally than any other company. The focus now is on growing that part of the market, which the market seems to be encouraging, and on penetrating neighboring market segments. For us, the neighboring segments are found in using the service provider as a more traditional channel for premise-based systems, in addressing the telcos' own customer care

needs, and in the trend for enterprises to adopt an internal services model. This has been an exciting story up to now, and my role is to make sure that CosmoCom develops these strategies to their maximum potential in the Americas region.

I would also like to mention the growing trend toward unified communications. Unified communications is a term that embodies the evolution of communication technology over the past decade. We like to point out that much of the focus under the name of unified communications is really about internal communication, employee to employee. Let's call it unified enterprise communications or "UEC." There is a whole other area that has evolved parallel to UEC, and that is unified customer communications or "UCC." UCC is a great way of describing what CosmoCom has been doing from the beginning — applying the unifying power of IP to the contact center and the whole world of customer interaction. Our message is that true unified communications need to address both the internal world of UCC and the customer-facing world of UCC. In other words, UC = UEC + UCC. Part of what this means is that the contact center is no longer limited to four walls, not even to four virtual walls. Customer interaction is a core mission of every business. Recognizing this, companies are expanding the intelligent routing capabilities of the contact center to reach more and more of their knowledge workers. This is great news for customers and good news for the contact center industry as well. CosmoCom has shown a great deal of leadership in this space, both in its product capabilities and in its disruptive "flex" pricing model that makes it economically

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

feasible to implement this approach where, literally, the whole company and everyone in it is part of the call center.

**TS:** What are the drawbacks to hosting?

**BE:** Hosting is not for everyone, and that is exactly why the hosted service providers are realizing that they also need to offer the traditional premise-based model, preferably with the same technology. We call this "channel convergence." Sometimes it's a hybrid approach that wins the day. Some of CosmoCom's service providers have succeeded by offering a rapidly deployed hosted service that evolves over time to a premise-based system. Since both utilize the same technology platform, the evolution is smooth and relatively painless.

**TS:** Does CosmoCom have any plans to go public/get acquired?

**BE:** CosmoCom is a venture capital-backed company, and VC investors are always interested in having an exit. But as a growing and profitable entity with a strong balance sheet, CosmoCom is not under internal pressure to create a liquidity event. And CosmoCom's investors, many of whom I met with before joining the company, are mature VCs that have the admirable traits of patience and confidence, so they are not creating such pressure either. We think we are on the right course to develop a great deal of value in the company, and we believe the market will inevitably recognize and respond to that value appropriately.

**TS:** Where do you see hosted contact center solutions in three and five years' time?

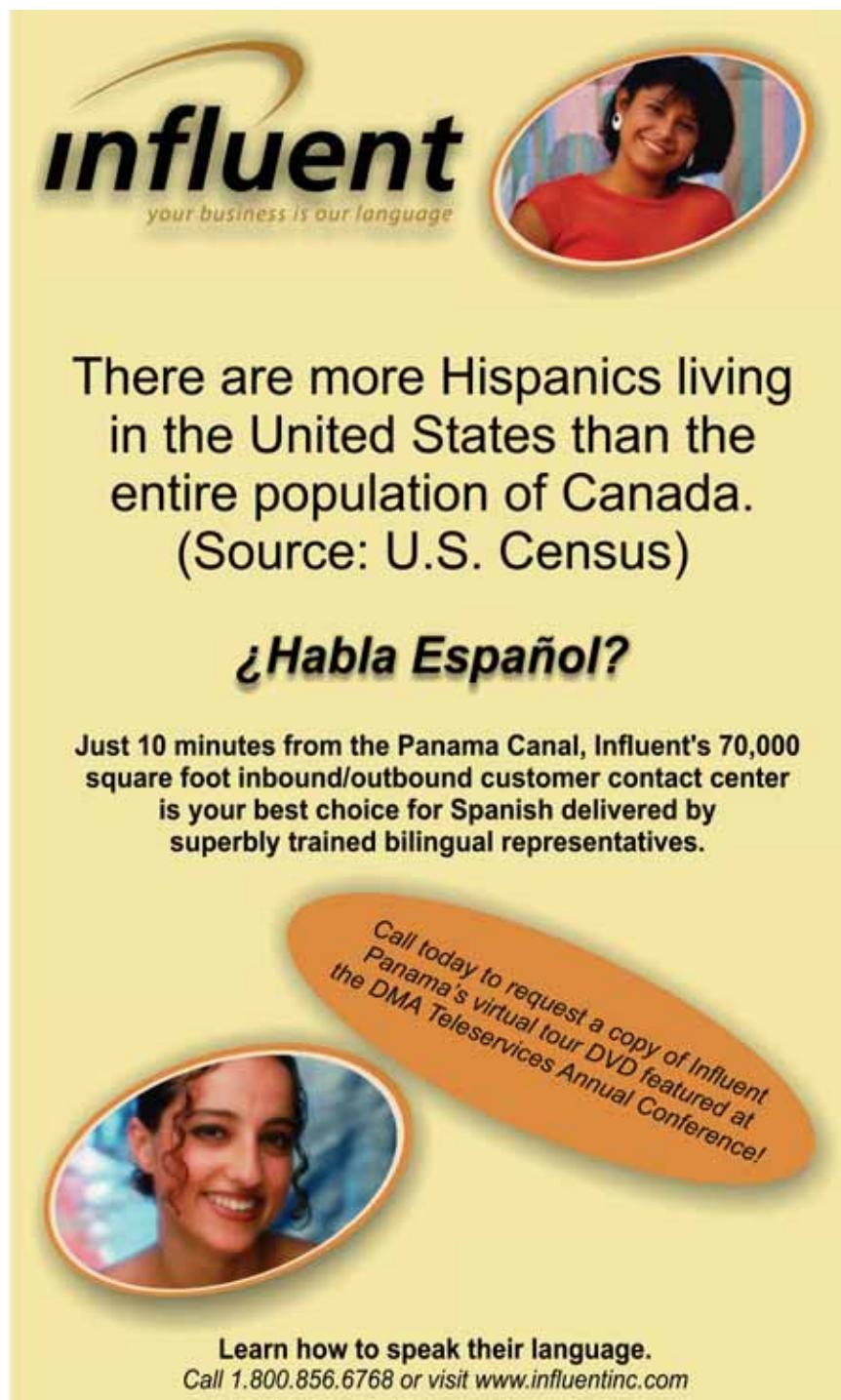
**BE:** Thank you for asking about three and five years in the future. I feel confident in giving you these forecasts, because no one will check them or even remember them. Hosted solutions will grow as a percent of the overall market for at least 10 years, until they reach about one-third of all seats. System integrators of all sizes will partner with the hosted service providers and develop lucrative integration practices around the hosted model. In three years, half of all contact center RFPs will require responses to include both hosted and premises

options, and the hosted model will be chosen 20 percent of the time. Five years from now, some of the largest and most visible contact centers in the world will be operating on a hosted model, and many industry players will not remember things being any other way.

**TS:** Where will CosmoCom be in three to five years?

**BE:** I'd say that in three to five years, CosmoCom will be exactly what it is now — the global leader in hosted contact center platforms, and a company that is also profiting from premises sales via channel convergence and from meeting the customer care needs of major telcos and network service providers. It's just a matter of growth and scale.

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



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# Finding The Holy Grail Of Truth In Your Recorded Call Data

Advanced recording technologies are a key investment for today's businesses. These technologies provide a way to capture customer interactions in their entirety, in context. Within this recorded audio is some of the most valuable business performance intelligence any business can have: the truth of your customer interactions.

Whether you measure upsell or cross-sell percentages, call wait times, average call handling time or any of dozens of other performance indicators, your goal is to obtain an objective measure of success. Ultimately, the real truth about the value of your customer interactions can be gleaned only from the spoken words that constitute the actual interaction. All other interpretations are subjective; if you really want to understand what's going on, you have to go back to the audio data.

Take, for example, average call handling time. For many companies, this may be relied on as a key metric, but it can be a poor performance indicator in situations such as online procurement. A company with short call handling times, for example, might decide it's not seeing the sales performance it expected. It's not until that company analyzed its auditory data that it found out why. In order to perform to the metrics, the company's reps were taking the sale and then hanging up to shorten the call time. In the process, the agents were failing to verify the sale while they were on the call. As a result, when a sale didn't go through, the rep would have to call back and reacquire the customer data. Although this mode of operation might result in shorter call handling times, it significantly raises the overhead associated with each sale and erodes profitability. It took an analysis of the actual customer interactions to reveal the disconnect.

While audio data are much richer than what's captured in traditional reporting metrics, the information's value is a two-edged sword: The more comprehensive the recordings, the more actionable intelligence these recordings can provide for making strategic business decisions. At the same time, the more audio data that are gathered, the more critical and challenging becomes the task of extracting and analyzing that intelligence; that is, of getting to the real truth of customer interactions — the “holy grail” of call recording — in a way that is effective and efficient. The only way to unlock the value and get a good return on your recording investment is through audio mining, or speech analytics.

There are a number of different definitions, aspects and approaches to speech analytics, but the key to making this technology pay off for maximum return on investment is to be sure the method you use can access all of your recorded data, accurately, quickly and in a cost-effective and flexible manner.

## Evaluating Speech Analytics

There are two main categories of audio mining technologies that employ different types of speech recognition.

By Anna Convery  
Nexidia

## What Is “Phonetics”?

Phonetics provides a means of describing and classifying virtually all the sounds that can be produced by the human voice, on the basis of “phonemes” — the smallest unit of human speech. All human utterances have been cataloged within a range of 400 phonemes. The majority of languages are made up of an average of about 40 phonemes. Searches using phoneme pattern matching can be executed on:

- blended words;
- proper names, slang, code words, brands, etc.;
- non-standard grammar patterns; and
- ad-hoc use of different languages.

The first, speech-to-text (STT), relies on a dictionary-based approach. This method maps all words or phrases from the recorded audio into lexicon entries, converting them into text to create a searchable index. This mapping is based on a predefined dictionary of key words and phrases, incorporating advance decisions about appropriate word bindings. The key to effective STT analytics is to ensure that your dictionary contains the right key words and phrases and all of their variations. The inherent flexibility of the human language can make this challenging, and proper names or unusual phrases can cause inaccurate or incomplete results. Some speech-to-text systems address this issue by introducing semantics-based constraints; i.e., the probability of word sequences. While this improves the accuracy of the dictionary-dependent approaches, it can extend processing time — a significant impact in a situation where you are indexing and searching hundreds or even thousands of hours of recorded audio.

Unlike the speech-to-text approach, the second type of speech analytics, phonetic audio mining, processes recorded audio with a phonetic recognizer to generate the index file. With this method, search terms or phrases are converted into a phonetic sequence (phonemes are the individual sounds that make up the spoken word) and

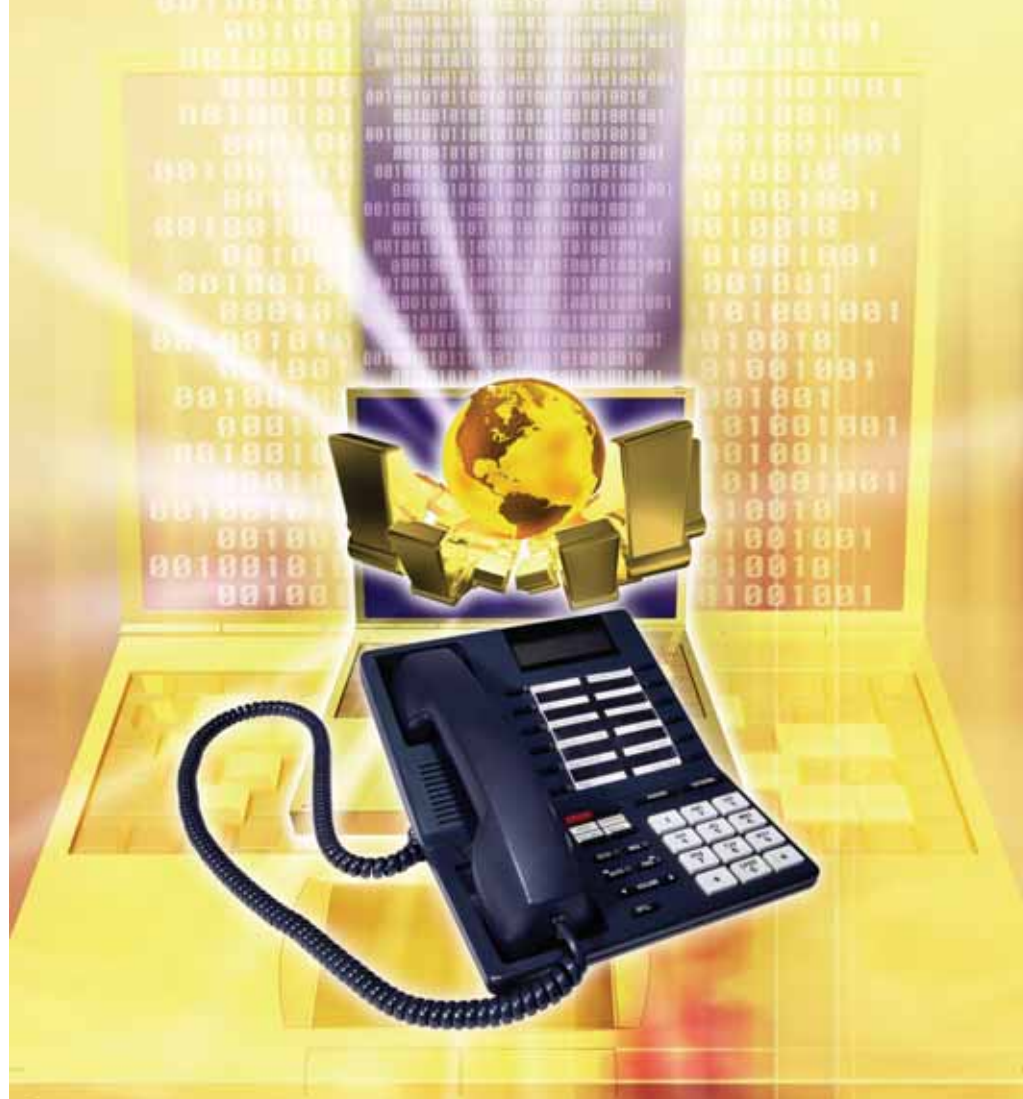
matches for this phonetic sequence are retrieved from the phonetic index files. In general, this method offers a number of advantages over STT. First, it's faster. STT systems can pre-process audio data (create a searchable index) at two to three times faster than real time (the time it would take to play the audio at normal speed). The best phonetic search technologies, on the other hand, can pre-process the data at a rate more than 60 times faster than real time.

There is another drawback to the complex language model required for STT approaches to generate good search results: the need to re-index recorded audio every time a new word or term is introduced. If the word was not incorporated into the lexicon against which the recorded audio was processed — even if it was spoken many times throughout the recordings — it cannot be located by subsequent STT searches. Therefore, in order to add the term to the searchable index, it will have to be added to the lexicon, and all of the recorded audio re-processed. Phonetic speech analytics, on the other hand, maintain an open vocabulary, since they operate at the level of spoken sounds, not words. This means you search indexed audio for new terms as needed, without having to re-process the original recordings.

#### Are We There Yet?

As with any technology investment, one of the key determinants of time-to-value for speech analytics is how quickly you can go from installation to productivity. This involves the tasks that must happen in terms of implementation, customization and learning curve before the solution delivers you at your destination — that “aha!” moment when the audio you have recorded actually emerges as actionable business intelligence.

With a phonetic approach, you can begin indexing your audio immediately, because there is no need to pre-define special terms or phrases such as proper names, brand names, acronyms or slang terms to be able to find them in the processed audio. STT systems, on the other hand, require that you add such



terms to the lexicon prior to processing if you wish to be able to search for them. If you choose the STT approach, be sure to evaluate what is required in terms of a user learning curve in order to manage this customization and if it will be necessary to engage the STT vendor each time you update the lexicon.

Accents and dialects are another area where a phonetic-based solution will give you an advantage. Because this type of software searches on sounds, not text, it is typically able to search effectively regardless of the speaker's accent, dialect or speaking style.

#### The Needle In The Haystack

The relevance of returned search results has a significant impact on their usefulness. The surest way to find a needle in a haystack is to remove everything that isn't a needle. Look for the ability to search for specific words and phrases in proximity to other content to generate the most relevant results. For example, a manufacturer of pharmaceuticals may want to identify any occurrence

where “package” or “bottle” occurs in proximity to “open” in all toll-free number calls that make reference to the company's arthritis medication. Such a contextual search will help them spot and correct a packaging problem that makes it hard for their customers to use their product before it translates into a drop in market share. Robust contextual search capabilities will help narrow the range of returned data and avoid unintended and insignificant results. Specific contextual searches are most often required by product managers, quality assurance personnel, compliance officers, manufacturing and marketing managers. Therefore, in selecting a speech analytics system, be sure that both power users and casual users can quickly and easily perform ad-hoc contextual searches on large sets of audio data to maximize the usability and accessibility of the results.

Usability will also be greatly enhanced by a speech analytics solution that provides sophisticated user reporting capabilities. Metadata — the data about the

information that helps to classify and structure search results — should be presented through a flexible reporting interface that enables users to easily manipulate search results for the most meaningful presentation of the data. This allows recorded calls to be easily grouped for analysis based on your specific business model. The interface should facilitate the sorting of the information to receive true multi-dimensional views of the intelligence contained in the recorded audio.

The next step in your search for the truth of your customer interactions will ultimately ensure the accurate analysis of the data: human listening. Your goal with the implementation of advanced recording technologies is to capture the actual spoken interactions between your customers and your representatives. Speech analytics gives you the ability to pinpoint the precise audio data you are looking for within hundreds or thousands of hours of recorded calls. In addition to creating reports and metrics based on those data, your speech analytics system should also make it easy for users to drill down to the referenced audio files at any stage of the analysis. This way, the audio can immediately be played and the result can be listened to within the context of the original file. This brings into play the uniquely discerning human listening skills that no technology can completely duplicate. For this reason, it is very important that your system enables easy access to the original recorded files.

It is also important to look for a search engine that can deliver relevant, accurate data even from poor-quality audio such as cell phones. There is little benefit in faithfully recording every customer call if you can ultimately analyze only those recordings that are clear and crisp.

#### Putting Analysis Into Action

There are a lot of reasons why you should record your customer interactions, but the leading driver for this is to evaluate and improve customer service and call center performance. For this purpose, analysis of the recordings will illuminate hard call center metrics — such as transfer of calls, first-call resolution, average handle time and lost sales

opportunities — with root-cause intelligence, providing insight into apparent trends and performance levels. This intelligence enables customer service and call center managers to implement more effective improvement strategies. With the ability to identify, drill down and listen to specific problem calls, they gain an understanding of problem areas that enables them to develop targeted training and mentoring plans, streamlining the evaluation process and reducing agent turnover.

But with the right speech analytics, an even broader range of strategic business value can be derived from these recordings.

For example, product and brand management can benefit from unlocking the intelligence contained in spoken customer interactions. In the retail world, brand value, product lifecycle management and consumer knowledge are the foundations of success. The recordings of targeted customer interactions, such as customer surveys and focus groups, as well as customer calls to product hotlines, contain crucial information about customers, products and projected buying patterns. Speech analytics turn this captured audio into a major intelligence asset for the retail company's analysts, product and brand managers, quality assurance and liability managers, and customer satisfaction managers. Eliciting relevant contextual information from captured audio enables them to conduct detailed, complex analyses of product groups and extensions, and provides the necessary intelligence to perform automated trending of product lifecycle indicators. Speech analytics give product managers an effective tool to automate reporting of key product launch metrics (competitors, pricing, product directions, etc.), as well as performing predictive analyses on new product ideas.

For purposes of market analysis and competitive positioning, recorded audio from product hotlines and market research focus groups can be a gold mine of information. With targeted, contextual search capabilities, analysts can identify and search on key product elements to narrow and focus the retrieved data for deep, detailed analysis. This will

allow them to ascertain the real story of how the market views their products or services. With the right speech analytics system, it should be easy to translate the elements of a successful product launch into audio search terms, and thereby identify, quantify and act on unsolicited consumer feedback. This feedback — even simple suggestions regarding flavor or packaging — can translate into a multimillion-dollar market share.

Obviously, the bottom-line value of speech analytics is its impact on...well, the bottom line. All of the various commercial uses and applications of the technology are ultimately focused on maximizing financial performance, with revenue generation as the leading initiative. Recorded customer interactions enable companies to identify and maximize revenue opportunities based on the most important component in any market analysis: the voice of the customer. Regardless of whether you initially recorded your customer interactions with revenue generation in mind, these recordings offer an unparalleled information resource to develop and tune your sales strategies. Good speech analytics will unlock the information in recorded audio to provide a more comprehensive view of the organization. This allows you to mine patterns, trends and cause/effect relationships to help uncover new revenue opportunities, identify upsell and cross-sell opportunities, analyze lost sales and replicate successful agent methods.

Once you have a strong speech analytics system in place, you will discover more opportunities to gain actionable insight into your business performance, derived from the truth of your customer interactions. From basic customer service initiatives to product roll-outs to compliance and standards enforcement, leveraging the intelligence within your audio data with speech analytics will take you beyond recording to responding and beyond analysis to action that has a positive impact on the bottom line. **CIS**

*Anna Convery is senior vice president, marketing and product management, for Nexidia (<http://www.nexidia.com>), (news - alert) a provider of highly scalable, highly accurate rich media search and speech analytics software.*



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## GN 9350 DECT 6.0

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By Tom Keating, CTO and  
Executive Technology Editor, TMC

GN Netcom's ([news](#) - [alert](#)) GN 9350 DECT 6.0 headset is one of the most versatile headsets I have ever reviewed. When GN Netcom told me they had a new headset for both PC audio and phone audio while leveraging the range and interference-free characteristics of the DECT 6.0 standard, I knew I had to review this headset. (Note: DECT 6.0 operates at 1.9Ghz so it is less apt to experience interference from WiFi 2.4Ghz signals.) With the GN 9350, you can get your Skype on, your iTunes on and your phone on, all using one wireless headset.

Comparatively speaking, the GN 9350 is similar in functionality to the Plantronics Voyager 510 Bluetooth headset. Both support VoIP, both can use any PC audio application, both use USB and both are wireless. However, the similarities stop there, since the Voyager 510 uses Bluetooth and the GN 9350 uses DECT 6.0 for wireless connectivity. The advantage of the Bluetooth wireless spec is that you can use the same headset on both your PC (using the Bluetooth USB dongle) and your Bluetooth-enabled mobile phone. The GN 9350 was not designed for mobile phones, but rather for traditional enterprise desktop phones, to which the Voyager 510 cannot connect. Thus, these products target a slightly different audience. I should mention, however, that Plantronics has a higher-end model of the Voyager 510 called the Voyager 510S, which supports mobile phones, desktop phones and PC audio (VoIP) using Bluetooth.

One advantage of the DECT 6.0 spec over Bluetooth is range. When I tested



the Bluetooth-enabled Plantronics Voyager 510, the audio started to get choppy just 15 feet away. On the other hand, the DECT-enabled GN 9350 worked flawlessly with no choppiness even 250 feet away. GN Netcom claims 300 feet of range for the GN 9350.

### Installation

Installing the GN 9350 was a breeze. You simply connect the phone wire to one of its ports and the handset cord to the other RJ11 port. I will say that attaching the phone connectors was a bit tricky because the ports are recessed about one-half inch with a lip that hangs over and a tiny opening, making it difficult to get your fingers inside to connect the phone clips. I had to hold the wires from the outside and gingerly aim the RJ11 clips into the female ports — I felt like I was defusing a bomb like the injured “Cappy” in the movie *Executive Decision*.

It was then that I realized that the cover is actually removable, making it easy to make the connections. Silly me. Under the cover, I was surprised to discover an LCD display and a four-way thumb pad, which allows users to customize various features, including volume, bass/treble/normal, hook switch selection, range/power selection and protection level, which guards against sudden spikes in volume (acoustic shock). There is also a switch for choosing which type of phone system you have. In any event, after hooking

up the phone wires and playing with the LCD settings, I then connected the AC adaptor and the USB connector and was good to go.

### Base Unit Features

On the front of the base unit are two buttons for switching from PC to phone, and seven LEDs. One LED indicates when the headset is charging on its base (flashing) or when the headset is in use (solid). Another LED, red in color, indicates when you have the headset muted. Yet another LED indicates USB connectivity, another for power, and two blue LEDs indicate whether you are in PC or phone mode.

### Headset Features

The headset is very flexible in its wearing styles. You can wear it headband-style, neckband style (it wraps behind your head) as well as “over the ear” style. It features automatic volume adjustment that sets the volume on all calls (phone or VoIP) unless you set the auto-volume protection to level zero. The headset also features noise reduction, which can remove background noise from your environment.

The headset features a noise-canceling boom microphone, a charging port and a three-way switch on the end that performs volume up/down, as well as mute when you press it in. On the outside of the headset is a blue LED that blinks when in use and is off when not in use.

In addition, your headset can also be used with DECT cordless phones, which are GAP- (generic access profile) compatible. You simply pair the headset with the cordless phone's base station by pressing the headset's talk and mute buttons simultaneously for five seconds after entering the cordless telephone's GAP mode. Additionally, the headset supports a multi-unit conferencing capability. You simply start a call, then place a second headset on the base unit for two seconds. When



you remove the second headset, it will be conferenced into the call. You can repeat for any additional two headsets for a total of four headsets in the call.

Here's an interesting feature: emergency dialing via VoIP. The base unit supports "speed dialing" emergency services using your VoIP application (soft phone) simply by pressing the PC mode button and the phone mode button simultaneously for five seconds. This is useful if your workstation is locked; you can shave seconds off calling for emergency services. Of course, most of us can type our passwords in less than five seconds, but perhaps the emergency is that you injured your hand, which would make it a little difficult to do the three-fingered salute (i.e., pressing ctrl-alt-del) to log on.

### Testing

The voice quality was excellent and I was very impressed with the approximately 250-foot range before the audio started to cut out. Overall, I was pleased with the sound quality, range and the ability to switch from streaming music (PC) to an incoming call (phone). If your phone is supported, you'll even hear a beep in the headset alerting you to an incoming call. If you have the optional handset lifter, it can even lift the handset so you can take the call without being at your desk. The unit also supports EHS (electronic hook switch) to automatically answer a call, which does not require the handset lifter. Only certain phones support EHS. You can log on to <http://www.gnnet-com.co.uk/UK/EN/EHS-setup.htm> to see if your phone is listed.

Unfortunately, when you set the base unit to default to the "phone," it appears that you can't toggle from music to phone and then back to music using the headset button. You can go only from music to phone. For example, say you are away from your desk, listening to streaming radio when an incoming call arrives. You click the headset's button to switch to the phone connection, which uses the remote

handset lifter to answer the call. After you end the call, you cannot return to the PC's streaming audio remotely. You must press the button on the base unit to revert to the PC audio.

Similarly, when you set the base unit to default to PC audio, on an incoming call, you cannot switch to the "phone" using just the headset. You must be at the base station to press the phone button.

I didn't find this to be a big deal, however, since in most cases, you will be near your PC and phone (and therefore the base unit). Nevertheless, wireless headsets do add some nice office mobility, so it would be a bonus if you could hold the headset button for perhaps three seconds to toggle to the opposite (PC or phone) connection.

I found it a bit of a pain to put the headset back on the base unit to charge it. If you are slightly off, the charging prong hits the plastic on the headset and won't insert all the way. I had to wiggle the headset a bit to get it to dock. However, with a little practice, I was able to get it docked on the first try about 80 percent of the time.

### Beeping And Blinking... Beeping And Blinking

When simply using the headset to listen to PC audio (music), I found that the microphone picks up sounds and

plays them over the earpiece. For example, if you are listening to music with the microphone unmuted and you hit the microphone boom with your hand, it picks up the sound and plays it over the ear piece. Or, if you turn your head and the mic hits your cheek, it will pick this sound up. I was able to mute the mic, but found that it beeped every 10 seconds, which was a little annoying.

Beeping is a great reminder when you are using the phone feature, so you don't forget you are muted. When I'm in PC mode, unless using VoIP software all the time (which requires the mic to be unmuted), I prefer the microphone be muted with no beeping.

### Conclusion

Even with the beeping issue and the toggling issue, overall, I was very pleased with GN Netcom's GN 9350. It is now my office headset of choice due to its excellent range and very good feature-set. This multi-purpose headset is great for the office, since you can be working, listening to streaming music without distracting fellow employees and then switch instantly to phone mode on an incoming call. All these features, range and sound quality will set you back \$349 MSRP. However, I checked Amazon and I see the GN 9350 listed on Amazon for \$271.99. [CIS](#)

PROS	and	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better range than Bluetooth headsets (300 feet);</li> <li>• Battery life is nine hours PSTN talk time and six hours VoIP talk time;</li> <li>• Connects to both desktop phone and PC (USB);</li> <li>• Uses DECT 6.0 spec and DSP for excellent sound quality;</li> <li>• Integrates with DECT 6.0 cordless phones;</li> <li>• Offers three wearing styles; and</li> <li>• Offers multi-unit conferencing capability.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slightly heavier than the Plantronics BT headset;</li> <li>• Can't toggle from PC/music mode to phone and then back to PC/music. Can only go once from PC to phone. When in PC default mode and on a call, you can switch only once to PC and cannot return back to the phone mode;</li> <li>• Slightly tricky to dock the headset into the base unit; and</li> <li>• Can't disable the "beep" when muted feature is on.</li> </ul>



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

## Sure We Provide Great Customer Service. It Says So In The Memo.

I have always wondered why so many companies bill themselves as “customer service leaders” yet in practice fall down on the job so completely that they become the brunt of water cooler jokes. Many studies, including ones recently conducted by [Aspect \(news - alert\)](#) called “The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction” indices for North America and Europe, indicate that there is a strong disconnect between the quality of customer service organizations think they are providing, and the actual level of customer service they provide, as judged by real customers.

It's a phenomenon that can be likened to the fact that many dieters, when asked to estimate their total caloric intake for the day, often underestimate the amount by staggering amounts. Intention (“I would like to eat less calories today”) does not by definition lead to results (“A turkey sandwich has how many calories? You're kidding!”)

I'm very fond of analogies. Let's use the following scenario to help illustrate the customer service crisis. Let's say that I'm a party planner. It's what I do; it's what I rely on for my income. There are many other party planners competing in the marketplace, but I attract customers by telling them that I'm the best. It's my differentiator.

So, on the big day of your anniversary party or wedding, I put everything into play...I contract the caterers, the photographer, the bartenders, the band, the flowers, the cake, the tent and chair rentals. You hired me because I'm the best. I told you I was.

But rather than stick around to make sure everything goes smoothly, I take it for granted that because I left messages for the caterer, the florist, etc., everything will work. I promised you the event would run smoothly, and my suppliers promised me that everything would run smoothly. No problems, right?

But in reality, on the big day, the caterer's salmon supplier failed to come through, and the caterer's assistant, an ambitious person who wants the top job, decided on her own that prime rib would make a great vegetarian entree. The photographer sprained his wrist the weekend before while playing water polo. He left a message on my VM, but I was out of range and my wireless provider experienced a delay in delivering the message to me. The cake baker got a migraine...the cake was ready, but someone would have to go pick it up. The flowers got left in the hot sun in the wrong part of the party venue; because no one knew they were there, they were left for hours and wilted. The company I hired to provide a band promised me a swing band for Harold and Sadie's sixtieth anniversary party, but the swing musicians couldn't make it, so the entertainment company sent a Goth punk-metal band called “Death Kittens of the Black Plague” instead.

Your party turns out to be a disaster, despite my promises. Why? Because I wasn't there to keep tabs on all the individual components and the nitty-gritty operations. I failed to troubleshoot the problems. I was utterly unaware of what was going on behind the scenes. I assumed that because I set everything up properly, events would run smoothly.

This is the process I see behind many companies that promise you “the best customer service,” but ultimately fail in most cases. They put a great CRM system into place, they bought an expensive e-learning system, they laid their training processes out in stone and told supervisors to adhere to it. They set thresholds, formed committees to address mandated compliance issues and launched a QA department. So what could go wrong?

What goes wrong is they don't stay “on the ground” to make sure

their best-laid plans go smoothly. They don't pay their supervisors enough to care whether thresholds are met and training practices are adhered to. They have little communication with their IT department, so the IT department has no idea what the company has promised and what goals they, as support personnel, should be meeting. The threshold levels for things like average wait time have been determined, but no one has really been identified as the person who is ultimately responsible for keeping tabs on those key performance indicators. The IVR menu tree was set up by the Marquis de Sade. Managers are so busy with paperwork and training it takes them three days to realize that a single angry agent has been abusive to 465 customers since Wednesday. The company has an expensive monitoring system which is sending screen pops to a supervisor telling her that the rogue agent is addressing platinum customers as “mold-eating goat lickers,” but her son is in the hospital with a broken leg, and the supervisor covering her work was not trained on the system and, besides, “it's not his job.”

Too many companies seem to convene meetings to talk about improving customer service, at which time they prepare a report of company standards for customer service excellence. The report is circulated to all manager-level and upward employees, and the QA team congratulates itself on crafting such a fine program. The marketing department and ad agency create print ads and television commercials boasting about the company's stringent customer service.

But in reality, 60 percent of those quality standard mandate reports ended up gathering dust in employee mailboxes, primarily because no one checks their postal mail anymore in these days of electronic communications. The mailroom guy didn't notice the decaying reports — he seldom turns on the overhead lights for fear of neutralizing the brain wave-blocking effects of his tin foil hat and alerting intergalactic agents as to his whereabouts.

For those people who did read the report, they were confused by the passive and rhetorical language in the manual. “Average wait times should be kept under two minutes.” No one was ultimately deemed responsible for maintaining the standards, and no methodologies were outlined to accomplish the feat. As a result, everyone who read the manual assumed the directives were “someone else's responsibility” and ignored them in the same way they ignored the last 29 cheery e-newsletters from the CEO to the rank-and-file.

The result? The whole shiny new customer service excellence program was left out in the sun to wilt, and nobody even bothered to check if it was there, let alone working properly. Meanwhile, someone in the IT department decided that “Death Kittens of the Black Plague” makes for totally righteous hold music. **CIS**

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