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March 2007 • Vol. 25/No. 10
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See inside cover flap





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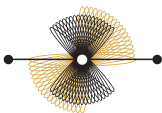
- **Phones:** SIP phones, home phones, digital business phones, headsets?
- **Call routing:** PSTN phone lines, VoIP, or a hybrid approach?
- **Media types:** Will at-home agents handle e-mails and Web chats along with calls?
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Also In This Issue:

- **Insight Into Alternative CRM:**
The Best CRM Delivery Method For You
- **The 22nd Annual Top 50
Teleservices Agencies Ranking**
Focus On Outbound
- **Display Technologies Roundup:**
How Digital Signage Benefits Your Call Center
- **Winning Friends For CRM:**
5 Keys To Gaining End User Acceptance

If you value your customers...

...why do you keep them ON HOLD?



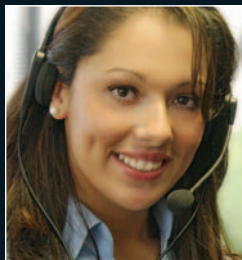
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By: Nadji Tehrani,
Founder, Chairman & CEO, Editor-in-Chief,
Technology Marketing Corporation

Merger Mania Has Created Vigorous New Business Opportunities For SMBs

In the last several years, there have been approximately 33 notable mergers and acquisitions in the contact center industry and, to the best of our knowledge, most of these have been successful business propositions.

As indicated in previous editorials, mergers and acquisitions are successful when, and only when, one plus one equals three. In other words, strategic acquisitions are most likely to be successful provided the original founders, entrepreneurs and management team remain intact and bring their expertise to the parent company. Unfortunately, in most cases and for a variety of reasons, the founding entrepreneur, along with important senior management members, are separated from the ven-

tions) in general can be attributed to several factors, among them the following:

1. Lack of cultural compatibility between companies;
2. Clash of egos; and
3. Divergent business philosophies, among many other things.

Having said the above, to the best of our knowledge, the success rate for mergers and acquisitions in the technology sector has been far higher than for those in the teleservices industry. The reason for them are beyond the scope of this editorial.

As indicated above, there have been approximately 33 transactions in the contact center industry (see Table 1) in the last several years. We believe consolidation of this type can be extremely helpful to the industry provided the actual needs of contact center management and operations are considered to be the highest priority. We wish all of them success and we hope that all of them will be successful mergers.

Every call center manager would like a vendor that can provide them products and services that are better, faster and cheaper.

ture, and therein lies the source of many problems and subsequent failures of mergers, resulting in one plus one equaling zero.

The failure of a significant portion of M&As (mergers and acquisi-

TABLE 1.

Call Center Mergers And Acquisitions

CenterForce Solutions
(acquired by Concerto, 2004)

SmallWonder! Softworks Inc.
(acquired by Melita, 1999)

eShare Technologies Inc.
(acquired by divine, inc., 2001)

Quintus Corp.
(acquired by Avaya, 2001)

PeopleSoft
(acquired by Oracle, 2005)

Syntellect Inc.
(acquired by Enghouse Systems Ltd., 2002)

Digisoft Computers
(acquired by TouchStar Software, 2005)

Apropos
(acquired by Syntellect, 2005)

Clarify, Inc.
(acquired by Nortel, 1999)

Thales Contact Solutions/RACAL Recorders
(acquired by NICE, 2003)

SITEL Corp.
(acquired by ClientLogic 2006)

ClientLogic
(acquired by Onex Corporation, 1998)

Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories
(acquired by Alcatel, 1999)

VoiceGenie
(acquired by Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories/Alcatel, 2002)

Advanced DataComm
(acquired by Working Solutions, 2006)

West Coporation
(acquired by Thomas H Lee Partners, 2006)

FrontRange Solutions Inc.
(acquired by Francisco Partners, 2005)

Siebel
(acquired by Oracle, 2005)

Telephony@Work
(acquired by Oracle, 2006)

Performix Technologies
(acquired by NICE Systems, 2006)

IEX Corp.
(acquired by NICE Systems, 2006)

Nuasis Corp.
(acquired by Intervoice, 2006)

Aspect Communications
(acquired by Concerto, 2005)

Rockwell FirstPoint Commerce
(acquired by Aspect, 2004)

CellIT
(acquired by Davox/Concerto 2002)

Dictaphone
(acquired by Nuance, 2006)

Mercom
(acquired by Verint, 2006)

The Opus Group
(acquired by Verint, 2005)

Amae Software
(acquired by Witness, 2006)

Witness Systems
(acquired by Verint, 2007, pending approvals)

Blue Pumpkin
(acquired by Witness Systems, 2005)

etalk
(acquired by Autonomy, 2005)

Dakotah Direct
(acquired by West Corp. in 2002)

Powerful New Business Opportunities For Small Businesses

Every time a major consolidation takes place, in my judgment, many new opportunities become available for small businesses. In this editorial, I intend to review several of these opportunities and explain how an entrepreneur can go about taking advantage of them.

As we all know, the days of one-size-fits-all and off-the-shelf solutions are long gone.

These opportunities and the success of the SMBs (small to medium-sized businesses) are usually enhanced because of the following reasons:

1. Small, Profitable Niches are Often Ignored by Large Conglomerates.

Not only is this true, but also larger conglomerates will simply not consider small niches of opportunities. For that reason, a new door of opportunity is open to entrepreneurs to come in and fulfill the needs created by those ignored niches.

2. Speed.

As we all know, every consumer and **every call center manager would like a vendor that can provide them products and services that are better, faster and cheaper.** Usually, these criteria can be best met by smaller companies that can literally turn on a dime.

3. Adaptation of Service.

Small entrepreneurial companies will succeed when they are able to adapt their services to the customer's needs. **As we all know, the days of one-size-fits-all and off-the-shelf solutions are long gone.** Today, customers want solutions that are tailor-made to their needs and backed by quality, flexible service.



The CEO: "These numbers are killing my long-term strategy!"

Marketing Director: "Our customers aren't buying, and I don't know why!"

CFO: "Ooh! Ooh! What will the shareholders say?"

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As the industry's leading publication since 1982, it is our distinct honor to congratulate all the companies in the 22nd Annual Top 50 Teleservices Agencies Ranking (outbound). By becoming a Top 50 Teleservices Agency, you have distinguished your company as one of the very best in the outsourced teleservices, customer care/CRM industry. Be sure to inform your customers and prospects of this great news, for awards without marketing and differentiation are wasted! Please read my Publisher's Outlook titled "Award Marketing" at <http://www.tmcnet.com/cis/0203/0203po.htm>.

4. Tailor-Made Solutions for SMBs.

Following the above comment, new SMBs can become successful provided they focus strictly on tailor-made solutions that will answer customers' specific needs.

5. The Key to Success.

The key to success in this age of merger mania is for the entrepreneur to find new areas of needs in the call center, then develop software and/or services to address those needs.

Small, Profitable Niches are Often Ignored by Large Conglomerates.

6. Small Niches Can Be Profitable.

It is a known fact that small niches are usually very profitable due to a lack of major competition. And, if you are really providing an excellent service and excellent product, you can charge a significant price and, thereby, create a very healthy profit margin.

While a niche by itself, by definition, is a small sector of a business, its profitability justifies its existence.

However, to make it big in the small niche environment, you need to develop several niches and try to make most, if not all of them, successful, then your profitability could be substantially higher than that of the average large provider.

7. The Call Center Industry is Doing Well and That Should Help Entrepreneurs.

As I stated in my January 2007 editorial, the contact center/CRM industry continues to enjoy tremendous growth and profitability against all odds and the fact that it is a relatively mature industry now. What this means is that there is more reason and more room for new entrepreneurs to develop hot new applications and claim major market share in the fast-growing contact center industry.

Good luck and best wishes.

As always, I welcome your comments. Please e-mail them to me at ntehrani@tmcnet.com. CIS

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Dominican Call Centers Serve The U.S. Hispanic Marketplace

By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions
As Hispanic-American consumers become more affluent, they represent a rapidly expanding sector of the business-to-consumer market. American businesses are starting to realize that if they want to reap sales from this increasingly valuable market segment, they need to offer marketing and customer service in both Spanish and English, in whatever combination the customer prefers. And they need to start doing it now.
Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/475.1>

Avaya Announces New CIS Capabilities

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor
The components of the Avaya Customer Interaction Suite are Call Center, Interaction Center, Voice Portal, and the new reporting and analytics platform, Avaya IQ. Rather than referring shoppers to toll-free numbers or less personal Internet content, using Avaya IQ stores can connect consumers to remote product experts via live video through integrated voice/video kiosks.
Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/476.1>

Study: Voice Biometrics Could Solve CRM Woes

By Susan J. Campbell, TMCnet Contributing Editor
Caller identification procedures and the need to protect customer privacy and information may prove to be a bigger challenge than contact centers can handle, according to research by Biometric Security Ltd., a provider of voice-based biometric verification and identity management.
Read the full article at <http://www.tmcnet.com/477.1>

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A man in a white shirt and tie is sitting on a globe, smiling. The globe is blue and white, showing continents and oceans. The background is a light yellow with a sunburst pattern.

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are too remote.

At-home agents aren't just a growing segment of the contact center workforce.

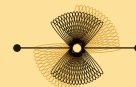
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By: Rich Tehrani,
Group Publisher, Group Editor-in-Chief,
Technology Marketing Corporation

The Wisdom Of Marc Benioff And Salesforce.com

Recently, I was invited to Manhattan for a [Salesforce.com \(quote - news - alert\)](#) media and customer event. Initially, I wasn't sure what the event was about — I accepted it blindly. Why? Because there is always something so entertaining and informative about the events this company hosts — I just had to be there. So after checking for scheduling conflicts and finding none, I sent in my RSVP, and a few weeks later, I showed up at the event, bright-eyed and bushy tailed (thank you, Starbucks) and ready to absorb new information. The event kicked off at 11:00 am, and there I was, on time to pick up my badge and associated company information.

Unlike the last event I attended in New York (see <http://www.tmcnet.com/478.1>), this one had pedestal booths. I would have been surprised that most of the booths were sponsored by financial companies if it had not been for an article (see <http://www.tmcnet.com/479.1>) I had read a few days earlier in BusinessWeek discussing Salesforce.com's targeting of the finan-

it made sense for them to branch out into the financial market by providing a service very similar to what might be offered from a Bloomberg Terminal (see <http://www.tmcnet.com/480.1>). The concept, of course, is that you don't need a terminal if you can host the service. The information provided consists of news, quotes, analyses, opinion, graphs, charts and more.

In addition, the information from WME is married to your traditional CRM system from Salesforce.com, meaning you can track stocks for customers more easily. Let's say a financial advisor has 1,000 clients and 75 of them have expressed interest in Apple as an investment. You can now ping those people more easily when you see Apple news of interest. In addition, you are able to log other information about clients such as their likes and dislikes. A platinum client who loves golf, for example, could be easily notified that Tiger Woods will be playing or appearing in the client's local area.

The point is, financial advisors are

To be honest, I didn't really attend to see the exhibits. I came to hear Marc Benioff speak, as he is quite a maverick in the industry. He has a unique and refreshing style that has been largely lost in the CRM and call center markets.

cial services market through a new initiative called Wealth Management Edition or WME.

Salesforce.com has traditionally been very strong in delivering CRM products to the financial services community, so



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going away from a commission-per-trade model and instead are focusing on relationships and charging fees based on a percentage of assets. This means relationship building and touching customers frequently are more important than ever.

Since Bloomberg terminals really don't integrate very well with other systems, this sort of functionality could not be duplicated easily by the company built by the sitting mayor of New York City. Besides, there are millions of financial advisors out there and only a few hundred thousand use Bloomberg terminals.

So, will anyone buy this new service? The answer seems to be "yes," as Merrill Lynch conducted a pilot of 5,000 users and has now decided it wants a total of 25,000. I can't imagine a better customer with which to kick off this initiative.

Getting back to the exhibits, I wasn't so interested in the financial vendors, of which there were many. I wanted to know how CRM would improve in the investment community, so I focused on booths like those of ([news - alert](#)) Siemens (<http://www.siemens.com>) and Cisco ([quote - news - alert](#)) (<http://www.cisco.com>) where the themes were tying unified communications into wealth management systems. I also saw a service from StraightThrough ([news - alert](#)) (<http://www.straightthrough.com>) that integrated the investing tools into the CRM system even more tightly.

To be honest, I didn't really attend to see the exhibits. I came to hear Marc Benioff speak, as he is quite a maverick in the industry. He has a unique and refreshing style that has been largely lost in the CRM and call center markets. The call center and CRM players that existed up until about 2000 were fairly entrepreneurial; you could hear the fire and passion in the words of company founders and managers. In many cases, this passion has died as companies have been rolled up into larger and larger private equity-backed companies that are more focused on accounting than product development. Alternatively, they have become product lines at Oracle. Sure, Larry Ellison is charismatic, but as his net worth has

become greater than that of most countries, he has become less and less accessible to the media. I suppose consolidation is a phase virtually all industries are dealing with but, thankfully, in the CRM space, Benioff's passion is still inspiring (and accessible).

Marc explained to the audience that the total number of Salesforce.com customers now stands at 29,800, which equates to 646,000 paying subscribers. He also mentioned that in the fourth quarter, the company processed four billion transactions; the number of transactions has increased and the response time per-transaction has decreased by 50 percent over the last few years. This is an admirable accomplishment.

From there, Benioff went into a discussion about Salesforce 2.0, a concept he calls "the new circle of success." This consists of six initiatives working together to become greater than the sum of their parts. These include Salesforce.com, AppStore, AppExchange, IdeaExchange and Apex.

IdeaExchange (see <http://www.tmc-net.com/481.1>) is a pretty novel concept. It is a community set up for Salesforce.com customers and prospects that allows community members to evaluate and comment on all things Salesforce.com. Benioff proudly stated that the company's roadmap gets posted to this site and customers can comment on what they want and don't want, like and dislike.

Marc is not adverse to controversy and has used it extremely well to gain publicity for his company. He has often taken shots at Siebel in the past, and I was curious if he would mention the company as now Siebel, of course, is part of Oracle. Marc did not disappoint. He mentioned that he has leased out space to many members of the AppExchange community of developers to enable these developers to work more closely with members of Salesforce.com. Here is the interesting part: it seems Salesforce.com is using an old Siebel building for this effort. Marc, of course, spun this story out in a very amusing way.

Was this meeting the same old dog-and-pony show you see at many of these kinds of events? The answer is an emphatic "no," and the reason is that Salesforce.com has done an amazing job of creating something unique. They have developed an on-demand operating system available to any developer to use and make money from.

The operating system consists of Apex DB, which allows for database creation; Apex Builder, which allows the creation of any user interface; and Apex Code, which creates business logic. The point is that before you get started delivering a hosted application of any kind, you need to build or lease a data center, build multitenancy, deal with disaster recovery issues and authentication issues, and set policies for upgrades, renewal, analytics, workflow, etc.

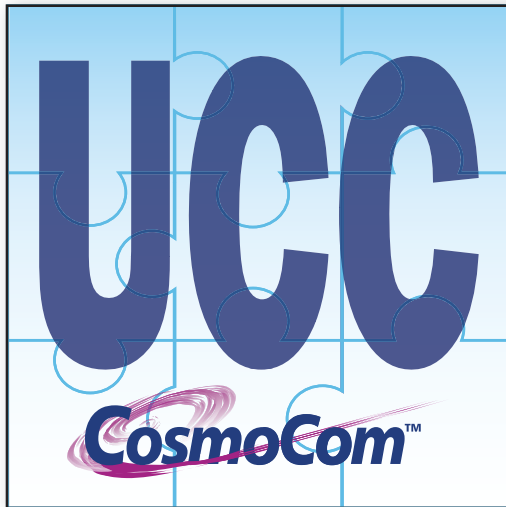
Now that the company has built all of these resources, you can effectively write programs that work on the system using a drag-and-drop interface. At this point, these applications are able to be sold through Salesforce.com. In addition, Marc made a point of mentioning that applications are SAS 70 Type II-compliant, which is essential for complying with Sarbanes-Oxley regulations.

There was a fun question-and-answer session at the end of Marc's presentation. He finished up by saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend. That makes Google my best friend." This, of course, was in reference to competition from Microsoft.

I asked Marc what he thought about all of the consolidation in the market and he said that organic growth is slowing in the client-server space and these companies must consolidate to survive. I also asked if the name Salesforce.com was limiting as the company expands. He replied that the CRM space is still growing quickly, as is the hosted market. From this perspective, he believes the name is still an excellent one, as are the names of the different initiatives, such as AppExchange.

And the fact that the company's stock ticker symbol is CRM is not too shabby, either. **CIS**

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

Verint And Witness To Merge

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

Analytic solutions provider [Verint Systems Inc. \(news - alert\)](#) and workforce optimization company [Witness Systems, Inc. \(news - alert\)](#) have announced that they have entered into a definitive agreement under which Verint will acquire Witness for \$27.50 per share in cash. The convergence of Witness' workforce optimization and Verint's actionable intelligence is expected to create a broad portfolio of contact center and enterprise performance solutions.

The combined Verint/Witness portfolio includes solutions for quality monitoring, IP recording, multimedia interaction capture, speech and data analytics, performance management, contact center and enterprise workforce management, e-learning and e-coaching, customer feedback management, and a full range of strategic professional and consulting services. This combination will enable small to mid-sized companies and large organizations to leverage customer intelligence for better business decisions and optimize workforce, contact center and enterprise performance to deliver a compelling customer service advantage.

"Verint and Witness share a similar culture with a passion for growth, results-driven execution and a laser focus on customer success," said Dan Bodner, President and CEO of Verint Systems Inc. "This strategic move will create a platform for rapid organizational growth and provide a wealth of opportunity for our global employee population."

For the near term, through the regulatory period, both companies will continue to sell, offer and support their recording solutions, and will continue well into the future to support customers of both solutions. The transaction is expected to close in the second quarter of 2007, at which time more information regarding the resolution of product overlap in the call recording areas, company management and headquarters location will be available. <http://www.verint.com> and <http://www.witness.com>

Microsoft's CRM Analytics

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Microsoft ([quote - news - alert](#)) has announced the availability of Microsoft Dynamics CRM Analytics Foundation, what company officials call "a new way of using business intelligence tools from Microsoft that "enable comprehensive analysis and management of customer-facing processes, including business scorecard management, ad-hoc analyses of aggregated customer information, predictive analytics, enhanced reporting and more."

Our friends from Redmond say they provide Microsoft Dynamics CRM users with "real-time access to key information and metrics, allowing them to respond quickly to changing dynamics in today's competitive business environment."

Microsoft officials say Analytics Foundation allows business performance to be tracked continuously through dashboards, lets managers and employees create reports and drill down into areas of interest and helps sales, marketing and service employees identify new opportunities to grow revenue and increase efficiency through the use of predictive analytics.

"Analytics and business intelligence are essential to getting the most from customer management systems," said Brad Wilson, general manager of Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

Analytics Foundation uses unified dimensional models to build analytics that can be delivered to end users in the tool of their choice. Capabilities include real-time business performance management, giving users access to a real-time graphical view of the health of their business and letting them drill into the details from their desktops.

The business reporting and ad-hoc analysis uses online analytical processing cubes that enable managers and users to analyze Microsoft Dynamics CRM data without the need for IT help. The predictive analytics use the data-mining algorithms within Microsoft SQL Server Analysis Services to detect patterns within customer information streams to generate recommendations for cross-sell and upsell opportunities to contact center agents or sales professionals, or prioritize leads based on a historical analysis of the types of leads that are most likely to convert to opportunities.

In other words, your basic CRM analytics.

<http://www.microsoft.com>

India Holds Great Promise For Telecom Growth

By Rich Tehrani, President and Editor-in-Chief

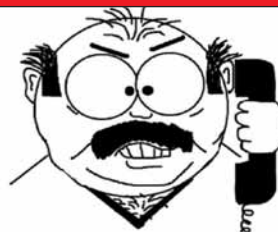
[Kent Charugundla \(news - alert\)](#) a well-known telecommunications entrepreneur and art field sponsor, has diversified global experience in IP/telecom, conferencing, call centers, networking, outsourcing markets and contemporary Indian Art. During the last week of November 2006, he participated in the largest trade mission ever assembled by the U.S. government to boost commerce with India. Charugundla represented the smaller companies in the telecommunications sector.

As U.S. investors are boosting their participation with one of the world's fastest-growing economies, I thought that this interview would be of value and interest to readers. Charugundla brings in-depth entrepreneur insights and practical recommendations. This can help readers to appreciate the opportunity that exists with one of the fastest growing economies in the world and help to participate, more specifically, in the telecom sector.

Read the full interview with Kent Charugundla at <http://www.tmcnet.com/465.1>

CallCenterComics.com

By Ozzie Fonesca



Ozzie

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Intervoice And BEA Integrate For IMS

By Stefania Viscusi, TMCnet Assistant Editor

Back in December of the past year, [Intervoice \(news - alert\)](#) and [BEA Systems \(news - alert\)](#) announced collaboration efforts to facilitate the adoption of IMS communication services like voiceSMS, voice mail and video mail in a bid to move closer towards IMS. Now, Intervoice is announcing the completed integration Media Exchange with BEA Systems converged EE-SIP-IMS application server, WebLogic SIP Server for a platform for next-generation application and service creating.

With the integration, the hopes are to break into the mobile-media subscriber services market as well as call center applications that work with traditional environments, as well. The two converged solutions are designed to specifically handle next-generation and IMS services as well as provide SIP-based session control capabilities to next-generation, converged IP communication services.

According to a news release, "The underlying technology is a runtime execution engine based on State Chart Extensible Markup Language (SCXML), and a service-creation development environment based on the Eclipse framework." This will aid in more extensible, rapid application development and service creation.

<http://www.intervoice.com>

TPI Releases 2006 Outsourcing Report

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

TPI, ([news - alert](#)) an advisor to global corporations on all facets of their service-delivery strategies for business support operations, has announced the developments for 2006 in the global outsourcing industry through the company's TPI Index report. The contracts awarded in 2006 represented the single greatest number of such agreements in any year, up three percent from 2005's previous high. After an exceptional first quarter, the year concluded with a total contract value (TCV) of \$78 billion, amounting to an eight percent decline from the prior year. Annualized contract value (ACV), an estimate of the average yearly revenue potential that may be derived from the 2006 contract awards, reflects roughly a seven percent year-over-year decline in ACV, according to the report. According to TPI, the number of "mega deals" — those with contract values above \$1 billion — was unchanged from 2005 but off \$5 billion in total contract value from the prior year. Elsewhere, the total number of transactions completed as the result of a restructuring of a prior contract was a record at 72, but the TCV of just over \$20 billion was not a record.

<http://www.tpi.net>



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Prosodie Interactive And LumenVox Announce Integration

Technology services provider Prosodie Interactive ([news - alert](#)) and speech tech provider LumenVox ([news - alert](#)) have announced the integration of the LumenVox Speech Engine into the suite of Prosodie Voice Solutions. The initial implementation, an inbound Survey Application, was designed to offer a more natural interface for participants than a DTMF (touch-tone) application and increase responsiveness and satisfaction.

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

SmartReply Launches CRM Loyalty Messaging Platform

Voice and mobile messaging provider SmartReply ([news - alert](#)) has announced the launch of a CRM loyalty messaging platform designed to seamlessly integrate voice, mobile and e-mail channels and enable clients to give their customers a preferred choice medium through which they receive marketing messages.

Companies can improve their speed and flexibility in executing their CRM initiatives while ensuring their messages remain targeted, relevant and delivered in their customer's most preferred manner.

<http://www.smartreply.com>

Aprimo Announces On-demand Version Of Aprimo Marketing

Enterprise marketing management (EMM) provider Aprimo Inc. ([news - alert](#)) recently announced Aprimo Marketing Professional Edition, an on-demand software version of the company's EMM suite. Professional Edition offers small to medium-sized businesses an opportunity to improve marketing effectiveness with a solution previously available only to large companies. Delivered as a Web-based service, Professional Edition enables rapid deployment and faster time to marketing ROI; customers can go live in days.

<http://www.aprimo.com>

Genesys Makes Video Available In The Contact Center

By Susan J. Campbell, TMCnet Contributing Editor

The first voice self-service platform with built-in support for video customer service has been launched by Genesys Telecommunications. ([news - alert](#)) The company has also announced key standards for enhanced network services that enable a wide range of new applications, from speech-enabled voice mail to IP-based services using Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). Genesys now offers this extensive support for video play-and-record applications that take full advantage of 3G mobile phones and other devices. Service providers are now able to offer a variety of new services, including rich media applications such as video voice mail, video conferencing, video-enabled music and game applications and video call-recording.

With VoiceGenie 7.1, a cellular service provider can offer consumers the ability to record and send copies of video conference calls or enable customer service representatives at a help desk to push instructional videos to help simplify a technical installation. Other video applications include telemedicine, video sharing and a range of other consumer entertainment applications.

Genesys positions its voice self-service platforms as providing enterprises and organizations with the tools to improve customer service. The company also offers its platforms to telecommunications service providers to create new services for consumers. Next-generation speech services are part of the larger trend toward dynamic customer interaction, which blends self-service and assisted-service throughout multiple touch points such as Web and multimedia devices.

Next-generation applications in customer service organizations can be rapidly developed with the new Genesys platform. Genesys VoiceGenie 7.1 and its sister platform, GVP, enable a complete range of voice self-service applications to respond to dynamic customer needs. The company has stated that it is focused on driving its technology beyond the contact center and into broader customer service settings in order to provide a consistent customer experience at every touch point.

<http://www.genesyslab.com>

Convergys, Tribold Announce Product Enhancements

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Convergys Corporation ([news - alert](#)) and Tribold ([news - alert](#)) have announced the enhancement of Convergys' Infinys Business Support System with additional product management capabilities. Through the integration of Tribold's Product Portfolio Manager application software, Convergys will enable Communication Service Providers to centralize vital product data into a single enterprise catalog. By integrating Tribold's suite of Product Management application software to the Infinys BSS product, so the reasoning goes, CSPs should be able to create, manage and control their products end-to-end, from business case development to product retirement, within a single view across all disparate BSS and OSS systems.

"Convergys is driving the need for operators to provide better product and service alignment. Yet, current back-office architectures are a challenge to this alignment," said François Lançon, Convergys SVP of Product Management and Marketing.

Last summer, Convergys announced that it had signed a five-year professional services outsourcing contract with VIBO Telecom, a Taiwanese 3G mobile operator, to manage VIBO's back-office operations. Convergys will continue to manage all aspects of VIBO's customer care and billing systems, extending a contract first signed in 2005 under which Convergys implemented and integrated its Infinys rating and billing and mediation software with VIBO's third-party CRM, activation, provisioning and partner management platforms.

<http://www.convergys.com>

Study Foresees Strong Growth Of Asia-Pacific Call Centers

By Leo Blanco, TMCnet Contributing Editor

The Asian Contact Centre Industry Benchmarking Report, a study on 747 call and contact centers, shows strong projected growth of Asia-Pacific call centers. The Philippines and Thailand are considered fastest-growing markets with 2007 projected growth of 33 percent. Singapore and Malaysia are set to grow at 32 percent while India, already a mature market, is expected to grow at 16 percent. Moreover, the study forecasts a 23 percent growth in the number of call center employees, increasing the total workforce to 704,400 employees. In the past, mature markets like India set the industry growth. However, the future belongs to emerging markets like the Philippines and Thailand.

Strong technology purchasing and upgrading plans are key growth indicators for Asia-Pacific call centers. About 62 percent of call and contact center companies plan to upgrade their current technology while 54 percent intend to procure new technology to boost performance. On the other hand, operating expenses are centered in labor, sharing 46 percent of the total budget, technology for another 23 percent and 19 percent for telecommunications.

<http://www.callcentres.net>

Contact Center Outsourcing Moves Away From Cost Containment

By Stefania Viscusi,
TMCnet Assistant Editor

Outsourcing has been seen in both a positive and negative light over the course of the years since it has become a popular business model. Depending on the way it's looked at, outsourcing can have a strong set of benefits, or enough negative possibilities to counteract the reasons for outsourcing in the first place. In a recent study by Unisys Systems ([news - alert](#)) that looks at Outsourcing in 2007, it was revealed that outsourcing will shift to more than just a focus on cost, but rather on other benefits such as security and data protection as well as access to better skills.

"Overall the global outsourcing debate will become less about cost containment and more about accessing the best IT skills and expertise. Global sourcing will apply equally to IT outsourcing and business process outsourcing," the study noted.

While the study focused mainly on IT factors in outsourcing, many of the same demands and tactics can be applied to contact center outsourcing, where cost savings may not be as beneficial as the other reasons to outsource. A similar look at contact center outsourcing can be seen when one considers that outsourcing contact center needs was once driven by cost containment but a backlash began when companies realized that though they were saving some money on agents' hourly rates by utilizing lower-wage agents offshore, looking to domestic centers made more sense because higher quality, what really mattered, improved customer loyalty.

One of the four factors Unisys believes will influence the new trend in outsourcing points to a more conscious focus on customer loyalty as a reason to outsource. Additionally, elements such as protecting customer data are also important and play an equal role in the reason why contact center outsourcing can benefit a company as they launch a campaign or look for quality support for their customers. Just looking to cost savings and not realizing the effects of an outsourcing partner gaining access to all your customer information can prove troublesome if a focus on maintaining loyalty via better protection and solid relationships with that outsourcing partner is not in place.

<http://www.unisys.com>

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CRM A \$7 Billion Industry In 2006

By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Driven by "significant gains in license" and "maintenance revenue," worldwide customer relationship management (CRM) total software revenue totaled \$7 billion in 2005, a 13.7 percent increase from 2004, according to Gartner. Sharon Mertz, research director at Gartner, credited the "robust gains" as the result of "strong vendor performance across the market, continued rapid adoption of on-demand solutions, increasing penetration of emerging markets, and buyer recognition of CRM applications as key drivers of customer acquisition and retention."

SAP was the number one CRM vendor based on total software revenue, with a 25.9 percent market share in 2005. Increased midmarket opportunity drove growth across the CRM market for both the large suite vendors and on-demand providers, [Gartner \(news - alert\)](#) reported, "such as salesforce.com." Siebel's strong fourth quarter results drove growth, but at the expense of Oracle and PeopleSoft CRM solutions. Industry specialists such as Amdocs also benefited from high demand for vertical market products.

Gartner has traditionally measured market share in terms of new license revenue. However, due to the emergence and increasing popularity of open-source software and buyer consumption models such as hosted and subscription offerings, Gartner has moved to measure market share in terms of total software revenue. This includes revenue generated from new license, updates, subscriptions and hosting, technical support and maintenance. Professional services and hardware revenue are not included in total software revenue.

<http://www.gartner.com>



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Workplace Ergonomics And The Telephone

By Stefania Viscusi, TMCnet Assistant Editor

Ergonomics have long been regarded as a necessary element in the workplace as they prevent injury and help keep employees working comfortably and more efficiently. However, one piece of office equipment that has been constantly overlooked when it comes to ergonomics is the telephone. Office phones, though improving technically over time, have been mostly designed without ergonomics in mind.

ShoreTel, a provider of enterprise IP phone systems, reveals their answer to this need as well as the details of their product offering in a recent TMCnet white paper, "Ergonomic Phone Design." Office phones should be comfortable to use just as all other pieces of equipment in the workplace are. Because office workers and those in call centers spend so many minutes on the phone each day, offering an ergonomically designed phone will support productivity and reduce the risk of injury while on the job — a benefit for both the employer and the employee.

A piece of equipment that is designed ergonomically is built to adjust to the need of each individual user and is specially designed to make the equipment easier to use. Everything from the placement of the microphone to the way the speaker is designed is all taken into account when designing a phone that is ergonomic.

Commenting on their ergonomic phones, Tom van Overbeek, ShoreTel's past CEO and a current member of the board of directors, said, "When we introduced IP Phones, we took it as an opportunity to create a higher quality phone. The design philosophy behind ShoreTel's IP phones is simple: Your office phone should be a joy to use."

<http://www.tmcnet.com/tmc/whitepapers>



CRM Solutions Through VendorGuru.com Simplify Call Center Services

[VendorGuru.com](#), ([news - alert](#)) a one-stop telephony and CRM resource for professionals, has released a customizable search database to help businesses improve their communications systems. For companies looking to reduce customer frustration and defection, search site [VendorGuru.com](#) now

offers a customizable search database, presenting products related to CRM systems and telephony for call centers of various sizes. Businesses can also locate lead tracking, contact tracking, sales pipeline/forecasting analysis and other services.

<http://www.vendorguru.com>

Sage Software Introduces SageCRM v6

[Sage Software \(news - alert\)](#) has announced the latest version of its CRM solution, SageCRM v6, for small and mid-sized businesses. SageCRM was designed to deliver a rich and customizable suite of sales, marketing and customer support capabilities through a Web-based architecture that allows users to choose flexible deployment options including on-premises, on-demand and wire-

less. Version 6 introduces new user training tools including instructional feature tours and on-screen coaching, new data management features including expanded search queries and grouping functionality, and enhanced system administration capabilities.

<http://www.sage.com>

Level 8 Changes Name To Cicero

[Level 8 Systems, Inc. \(news - alert\)](#) has announced that its shareholders have approved a plan of recapitalization. Under the plan, shareholders authorized changing the company's name to Cicero, Inc.; authorized the board of directors to effectuate a reverse stock split; increased the authorized common stock of the company; converted existing preferred stock into a new Series A-1 preferred stock of Cicero, Inc.; ([news - alert](#))

Axiom Integrates AXIOSS To Oracle's Siebel CRM

By Niladri Sahara Nath, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Axiom Systems ([news](#) - [alert](#)) has decided to integrate AXIOSS Suite to Oracle's Siebel CRM using Oracle Fusion Middleware. Thanks to the combined solution, service providers will have an integrated, end-to-end offering to bring new services to market rapidly. Axiom Systems is a member of the Oracle PartnerNetwork. The AXIOSS Suite blends operational service fulfillment, order management, inventory management and service activation with an active catalog. An active catalog is the place where service and product building blocks are developed, for example: network equipment, applications or even more abstract building blocks like work and rating instructions. These building blocks are modeled as components within the active catalog and can be assembled into service or product offerings that make sense to the customer or to a product manager.

"Today, service providers want and need to launch new services in weeks or days. Arguably, the potential of modern technologies such as IMS cannot be realized without this," said Brian Naughton, VP Strategy and Architecture, Axiom Systems. "Axiom Systems' AXIOSS Suite, integrated with Siebel CRM using Oracle Fusion Middleware, enables our customers to better achieve this goal."

According to a news release, Oracle Fusion Middleware provides a common technology platform for ISVs to integrate and support their entire mix of [Oracle](#) ([quote](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)) and non-Oracle enterprise applications while laying the groundwork for SOA. <http://www.axiom.com> and <http://www.oracle.com>

Left Bank Offers Monet WFM Live

By Stefania Viscusi, TMCnet Assistant Editor

Continuing with their efforts to offer workforce management solutions that are an alternative to expensive premise-based systems, [Left Bank Solutions](#) ([news](#) - [alert](#)) has announced a virtual alternative with the upcoming release of Monet WFM Live. The solution is a multitenant, pure Web-based workforce management (WFM) solution and features all the functionality of the Monet WFM solution along with additional advantages including a new multitenant architecture platform.

With the solution, there is no longer a need for service providers to have dedicated equipment or software licenses at each location as they sell new services, which allows access to Monet's features from anywhere in the world. With the new capabilities presented by the all Web-based solution, it can help companies keep up with the constantly changing and demanding workforce.

Charles Ciarlo, Left Bank Solutions' president and CEO, commented in a statement, "This solution is attractive to service providers and customers alike because they gain access to best-of-breed WFM technology that easily integrates with existing service applications and without the large expenses that typically delay implementation."

New features of Monet WFM Live include improved and easier management of tenant processes and other features, "secured continuous real-time data transfer" capabilities as well as "comprehensive set of web services (API) designed to address all major integration needs into ACD systems and third-party applications for HR, CRM, ERP, payroll, call recording/QM, analytics and other systems." <http://www.leftbanksolutions.com>

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and converted more than \$6.5 million of debt to equity. Cicero's solution was designed to provide rapid and seamless integration of disparate systems on end-user desktops. It is a non-invasive desktop integration product for contact centers and government agencies to improve the use of technology, enhance customer service, streamline business processes and reduce costs.

<http://www.ciceroinc.com>

Compiere Announces New Offerings For Open-Source ERP And CRM

Compiere, Inc., ([news - alert](#)) a provider of open-source business applications, has announced new support offerings for companies using its open-source enterprise resource planning and customer relationship management application. Compiere offers a three-tiered support model to meet the needs of its customer base ranging from small to medium-sized enterprises to large corporations across a variety of industries including retail, logistics, distribution, manufacturing and professional services.

<http://www.compiere.com>

Kana Launches Integrated On-Demand Suite

Multichannel customer service solutions provider Kana ([news - alert](#)) has announced the availability of an integrated suite of on-demand customer service solutions. Based on KANA's on-premise applications, the KANA OnDemand suite was designed to deliver the enterprise-class security, reliability and performance required for high-volume customer service operations, as well as the traditional benefits of a software as a service solution, including lower total cost of ownership, more rapid implementation and faster time-to-value. Organizations can deliver more efficient and consistent managed services across all channels, including e-mail, chat, call center and Web self-service.

<http://www.kana.com>

Avaya and Jacada Forge Partnership

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

Unified desktop and process optimization solutions provider Jacada Ltd. ([news - alert](#)) has announced it has signed a joint marketing agreement with Avaya. Under the terms of the agreement, Avaya ([quote - news - alert](#)) Consulting and Systems Integration and Jacada will jointly market and deliver Jacada customer service solutions globally.

The escalating number of applications used nowadays by call center agents means increased log-in time (having to enter user names and passwords multiple times, several times a day), increased training, inefficiency and a higher propensity for user errors. Jacada's WorkSpace solution simplifies an agent's desktop by providing a single, easy-to-use interface to the applications and contact center tools required to complete a customer interaction. Jacada WorkSpace is powered by Jacada Fusion, a process optimization platform that improves workflow across a company's existing business applications.

"From Jacada's perspective, this is a huge win for us," said David Holmes, EVP of Global Marketing for Jacada. "This agreement goes well and beyond the typical partner agreement. We are jointly marketing and delivering our contact center solutions. We're investing a lot on both sides to cross-train and promote the solutions to our joint target market. Avaya is opening a lot of doors we would not be able to otherwise open ourselves. From a go-to-market perspective, we have every reason to believe it's going to accelerate our path to the marketplace. We've been selling directly. There's only so many customers you can address with a handful of sales and services people. This instantly expands the scope of our marketplace. We have huge expectations internally for what this is going to mean for our business."

Said Brian Carmichael, global contact center practice lead, consulting and systems integration (CSI), for Avaya Global Services, "My team has done a whole suite of traditional contact center consulting services. With so many applications running on the desktop, there is a lack of integration. We're looking at this as a big opportunity to help grow our businesses and help our customers."

<http://www.jacada.com> and <http://www.avaya.com>

Altitude Software Launches Release 7.5 Of uCI Contact Center Suite

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

Contact center solutions provider Altitude Software ([news - alert](#)) recently announced the availability of Altitude uCI 7.5, the latest release of the company's flagship contact center suite. The Altitude uCI 7.5 release was designed to enable contact centers to embrace change, profit from virtualization, increase productivity and grow proactive customer service practices, according to the company. The latest release includes new features designed to strengthen the contact center's ability to embrace industrywide change. Native IP supports distributed operations, including home-based and remote agents, streamlining IT investments and optimizing human resources. The new version also offers proactive customer service features and friendlier voice self-service applications, and it provides managers with the tools to centrally design and implement flexible service-delivery models that profit from increased agent productivity.

Altitude IP Contact Centre provides businesses with a SIP-based, multichannel contact center solution, allowing for centralized management and configuration as well as intelligent routing, monitoring and reporting capabilities for several contact center deployment options, such as "on-demand" contact center; home or remote agents; multiple sites centrally managed or on customer premises.

The Altitude uCI 7.5 suite is designed to help companies reinvent customer service through "proactive customer care," enabling contact centers to use outbound calling to increase customer goodwill. Businesses can use the contact center to proactively contact affected customers when service disruptions are anticipated, or they can pursue customer satisfaction follow-up after service fulfillment. This business approach can prevent inbound call peaks, allow for better staffing and resource management and increase customer satisfaction.

Altitude's Unified Dialer application now includes a new Altitude Call Classifier module that complies with telemarketing regulations. The software nature of this solution, combined with its new hardware clustering capabilities, increase both scalability and redundancy while continuing to reduce costs.

According to a recent study published by Gartner, "Research shows that multisite organizations in key industry verticals, such as the financial services sector, are consolidating their use of contact center technologies — focusing on improving service delivery, while optimizing the costs associated with customer interaction. This has driven a focus on more effective use of established technology through improved desktop applications delivery, better initial call screening, more use of scripted customer interactions, self-service automation and multichannel contact management."

<http://www.altitude.com>



2007 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



CosmoCom



Left Bank Solutions



Stratasoft, Inc.



Verint Systems



Co-Nexus, Inc.



Dirigo Telecommunications



NICE Systems



Teleformix



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etalk



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Strategic Communication Systems



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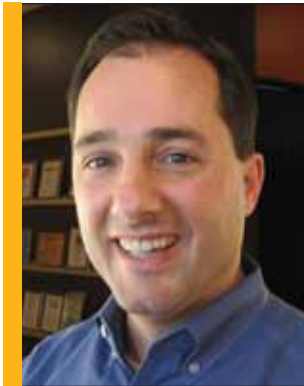


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Working Solutions





With Tim Passios, Director of Product Management, Interactive Intelligence

Q As we consider adding additional media types such as e-mail and Web chat to our contact center, are there certain things we should consider in order to improve our success rate?

A One of the first things to consider is if and how you will segment your agents to handle the new media types. Even when contact centers integrate multiple media types on the customer end, they don't always connect the dots at the agent end. Some agents are tasked with e-mail, some handle Web chats, others are relegated to the telephone and some are simply segmented into workgroups to manage each specific type of interaction. Depending on a contact center's operational framework and process flows, such agent arrangements present risk and a significant downside.

Agents who work across channels to handle all media types — non real-time as well as real-time — are better suited to provide service continuity and upsell or cross-sell services to a customer who, for example, sends an e-mail (non real-time) and then calls afterward with a follow-up question (real-time). With collaborative software and knowledge management tools at their fingertips, such as pre-authored response statements for Web chats and e-mails, agents can speed interaction times significantly. Doing so multiplies a contact center's opportuni-

ties to handle more interactions and, in turn, generate more revenue.

Some of the things to consider as part of a successful multimedia contact center implementation include:

- **Don't get caught implementing "islands of technology."** As I introduced above, what this means is that some contact centers simply aren't able to optimize agent talent in a multimedia environment because the technology they use forces them to segregate e-mail agents from Web site agents from phone service agents. Be sure your contact center platform allows the agents and the technologies to be blended, as required by you.

- **Implement appropriate service levels across all media types.** This does not mean the response rate to an e-mail needs to be as fast as the response to a live call. However, the perceived service level expected by the customer must be consistent. As an example, a

request for a Web chat cannot be effectively queued for a call back. However, a reasonable delay in response to an e-mail is most likely acceptable. Just be sure the service levels meet or exceed the customers' expectations.

- **Measure and monitor additional media types the same way you do phone calls.** The importance of an e-mail from a customer is just as high as an incoming customer phone call. Often, contact centers will take these new media types and view them as less critical. In reality, the agents need to handle all media interactions with excellence. Monitoring and measuring critical key performance indicators can help ensure customer satisfaction.

- **Link interactions from a single customer.** If a customer sends an e-mail and then initiates a follow-up telephone call later, it is important that the agent has access to the information about all previous interactions, regardless of the media type. Doing this will alleviate customer frustration. Good contact center platforms with strong back-end database integration will handle this without a problem.

A multimedia contact center can be a tremendous advantage for companies. It's important to let customers interact with you in a manner of their choosing. Done correctly, their satisfaction levels increase, your costs are reduced and your agents' performance levels are improved, which translates into a win for everyone involved. **CIS**



Tim Passios is the Director of Product Management for [news - alert](http://www.interactiveintelligence.com) Interactive Intelligence, Inc., a leading provider of business communications software for the contact center and enterprise with over 2,500 installations in more than 60 countries. For more information, contact info@inin.com or 317-872-3000.



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Insight Into Alternative CRM: On-Demand And Open-Source

According to Gartner, roughly 50 percent of CRM implementations fail to meet customer expectations. It's no secret that getting your employees to adopt a CRM system is often difficult and incredibly stressful. How can you find a "magic" CRM system that will grow your business, give you an edge over the competition and be readily adopted by your employees? The answer: do your research.

Unfortunately, there is no magic CRM system out there. Choosing the right CRM solution for your company will depend on a variety of factors, including your company's size, competitive environment and strategic goals. If you're willing to look beyond the most popular enterprise CRM vendors out there, you may discover that alternative CRM deployments, such as on-demand and open-source applications, can better suit your needs.

Lesson #1: Forecast Your Short-And Long-Term Needs

When choosing a CRM system, you'll want to focus on what features your business needs in the short term. On-demand, or software as a service (SaaS), CRM deployments continue to grow in popularity for companies that need dependable CRM solutions but that don't have the internal IT support to manage an in-house solution. If you prefer for a vendor to manage your CRM application, on-demand may be the best deployment option for you. With the growing availability and speed of the Internet, on-demand

CRM presents a convenient method for accessing your data and maintaining relationships with your customers. If you're a small company with little need for complex technical customizations, purchasing an on-demand CRM solution for ease of access may fulfill your CRM needs and help grow your business.

Today, on-demand is gaining speed in the marketplace as AJAX and other Web 2.0 scripting languages enhance the functionality of Web-based applications. For example, AJAX (asynchronous Javascript and XML) allows users to easily customize the look of on-demand applications. If you have ever used Google Maps, you've used AJAX, and you understand the luxury of dragging around images or modules and loading information instantly in one portion of a Web page without reloading your whole browser. In addition, on-demand CRM applications often have more features and modules than needed by



smaller companies. AJAX allows customers to design user interfaces (UIs) for on-demand applications, thereby helping each user customize the layout of the application to optimize user interaction.

Though an on-demand CRM application may be the simplest way to manage your customer relationships, remember that SaaS is not a common adoption for the enterprise. In a recent report (June 2006) on the presence of SaaS in the marketplace, Gartner analyst Michael Maoz wrote, "Right now, SaaS is a very small part of the marketplace. It only takes up one-half of one percent of overall enterprise applications. If you look out eight or 10 years, that might go up all the way to 30 percent."

If you decide that on-demand CRM is preferable for your business in the short term, don't forget that it's a good idea to forecast your long-term CRM needs before investing in a solution. For example, as a small company, you probably won't need to customize your system very much and will therefore be well serviced by the basic or easily-customized features of an on-demand sys-

By Chris Harrick
SugarCRM



tem. You probably also won't have sensitive information from your clients and can therefore stand to host your CRM solution through a Web browser rather than behind your firewall. As your business grows, however, you may need to build more functionality into your CRM system — capabilities not available through or supported by your Web browser-based on-demand solution. In addition, while on-demand applications require only an Internet connection for access and therefore seem convenient, a faulty ISP or bad Internet connection can leave you completely locked out of your system.

This brings us to the issue of security. On-demand systems require you to send information outside of your firewall, compromising the security of your clients' data. In the event that your business grows to hold sensitive financial or personal information about your client base, you may run into corporate or regulatory requirements that will force you to look into an installed (on-site) application, or even an appliance.

Another issue to consider with SaaS applications is interoperability. A good

on-demand CRM application may not serve a growing company's reporting, analytics, marketing and project management needs. To avoid this problem, some on-demand CRM vendors offer exchanges where customers can shop for third-party on-demand applications to run on top of their existing CRM database. In this case, your CRM vendor will most likely certify and support the third-party solutions.

Ideally, your small business will grow, right? Forecasting your long-term CRM needs may alert you to the possibility of your business needing to switch to an on-site deployment in time.

Unfortunately, if your growing business begins to outgrow an on-demand CRM deployment, you may find yourself in a fix when migrating to an alternate installation or appliance.

Switching from one CRM vendor to another can be costly, time-intensive and just plain painful.

The best way to avoid this is to ensure that you have a variety of deployment options. If you'd like to start with an on-demand system but can foresee moving to an on-site application later on, consider a CRM configuration that offers both types of products. If you're switching systems within a single vendor, you will probably face added migration costs, but you are more likely to avoid the headache of integrating your old data with a newer system. This means less training for your sales force and more time for interaction with and service to your customers.

Lesson #2: Look Into Open-Source

If you are in need of a stable and reliable CRM application but don't have the capital to finance a proprietary deployment, remember that open-source CRM applications are cost-effective alternatives that may offer you the same capabilities and features that you

need to manage your customer relationships and to grow your business.

Because proprietary applications are closed-source software, customers are always in danger of facing vendor lock-in after the initial buy. After investing in a proprietary CRM application (on-demand or on-site), you may eventually find yourself using a CRM system that doesn't play well with other applications (unless you pay more). Similarly, as you look to customize a proprietary CRM system, watch out for unexpected hidden costs.

Commercial open-source CRM is available from multiple vendors through on-demand and on-site deployments. Often, these vendors offer a free open-source version of their product as well as commercial professional and enterprise

Open-source applications expose their software source code and rely on developer communities to scan the application's code base, fix bugs and build additional plug-ins and modules to extend the functionality of the open-source project core platform.

versions based on the same open-source code. The professional and enterprise versions are available for sale, usually through an annual subscription, and often include added support and increased functionality, and will accommodate larger deployments.

When looking into an open-source or commercial open-source CRM solution, remember that open-source applications follow a different development model than proprietary applications. Open-source applications expose their software source code and rely on developer communities to scan the application's code base, fix bugs and build additional plug-ins and modules to extend the functionality of the open-source project core platform. One benefit to adopting an open-source CRM

application is that you will gain access to a community of developers that can help you with customization and support questions through online forums and wikis. Open-source developer communities can also help internationalize an open-source application quick-

ly. If you have a global business, you may look into an open-source CRM vendor that offers a variety of language packs, recognizes and accommodates data entries from various time zones and integrates with various scripting languages.

Open-source CRM vendors often have much newer code bases than large, proprietary CRM vendors and can therefore develop flexible, user-friendly solutions using today's popular software development languages. Because open-source software development relies heavily on a developer community that works pro bono, commercial open-source companies are able to invest heavily in research and development while maintaining lower costs than proprietary vendors.

Your open-source CRM provider may also have an exchange where developers can sell their certified extensions to the open-source CRM platform. If you're a small business with niche CRM requirements, open-source CRM may help you gain a business advantage that only your largest competitors can afford.

When looking at open-source CRM applications, don't forget to research how active the development community supporting the open-source project is. If there is a large community of registered developers and if you see a healthy number of vibrant projects and active forum postings, you'll know that you're looking at a good, mature project. If you don't see an excited community, you are looking at either a very young project or one that doesn't serve a large variety of customer needs.

One final bonus to note: if you're interested in shopping around for a CRM system, keep in mind that you can download open-source applications and start using them for free. If you're on the fence about what type of solution to choose, consider testing one or more open-source applications before turning to a proprietary vendor. Though you may find that open-source CRM products serve you well, you will at least have the opportunity to try out a CRM application before investing money in a particular solution. **CIS**

Chris Harrick is director of product marketing at ([news - alert](#)) SugarCRM (<http://www.sugarcrm.com>), a provider of commercial open-source customer relationship management software for companies of all sizes.

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Winning Friends For CRM:

Five Keys To Gaining End User Acceptance



When the implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) solution fails, many business leaders immediately pin the blame on the software. Software does play a major role in a CRM system, so the assumption that it is at fault is not unreasonable. The critical factor in the success or failure of a CRM solution, though, has little to do with the system itself. It has to do with the people who ultimately use it to perform their jobs on a daily basis. Ignore them and you'll have a full-scale revolt on your hands. But win them over and you will soon be on your way to making CRM a productive part of your business.

In a recent Forrester poll, CRM users ranked end user acceptance — not software — as the most important factor in the successful implementation of a system. Although software, implementation strategy and process definition are important, a CRM system will rise or fall based on the willingness of end users to integrate it into their work environment.

Resistance is inevitable when it comes to the implementation of any new system, and CRM is no exception. People have a natural tendency to avoid change, especially if it requires them to learn something that seems completely foreign. You can't do anything about that, but you can make the transition to CRM easier by helping end users in five important ways: communicating, listening, proving, training and rewarding.

Communicating

The primary goal in communicating is to keep users informed. Users will immediately reject a system when they feel it has been sprung upon them at the

last minute. To eliminate the element of surprise, clearly communicate the goals you want to achieve through CRM from the outset. Develop a concise, positive message about CRM and stick with it throughout the implementation process.

The message will vary depending on the size and type of business. For example, leaders at a larger business with employees who have already had to learn an extensive CRM system might find that workers accept change more readily. These employees are likely to already be aware of the benefits that can come from a new system. A smaller business investing in its first significant CRM system will probably need to work harder at selling its necessity to a more skeptical group of employees. These employees might ask, "I've done my work fine before, why do I need to learn to use anything new?" To answer

this, provide them with a message about exactly how the system will allow them to do their work quicker and more effectively. If employees know the system will make their lives easier, they'll be much more likely to accept the change.

It is particularly important to focus end users' attention on how CRM will benefit them directly. It's important to tell users how CRM will benefit the company, but it is crucial to reinforce how CRM will actually make their jobs easier.

There is a multitude of ways to communicate the benefits of CRM to end users. E-mails, newsletters, corporate gatherings and department meetings are all good message conduits.

Success stories are another great tool for communicating with end users. If an end user is experiencing good results and an easier time at work because of the new system, make sure everyone else knows about it, and recruit the successful end user as a cheerleader for the cause.

Listening

Communication is a two-way street. Keeping your end users in the loop is good, but it's just as important to listen to their feedback. Listening makes end users feel they are part of the process and gives them a stake in the final product. It's also a convenient way to get new ideas about how you can make the system more effective and efficient.

How do you get feedback from users? You ask them — through surveys, focus groups and one-on-one conversations.

By Mike Santoro
Technology Advisors, Inc.

Some businesses have even opened news groups for users to share their ideas with management and with each other.

Users will undoubtedly be curious about any change that will impact the way they perform their daily work. The trick is to listen and answer them in a way that will ease doubt. A good way to satisfy employees and obtain valuable feedback is to periodically ask users to submit comments and questions throughout the implementation process. Users can provide this feedback on an online workplace forum, via e-mail or in person during regular staff meetings. No matter the outlet, the key is to openly offer a way to voice questions and opinions before, during and after implementation.

Once you've heard what the users are saying, the next step is to actually implement their ideas. Some changes will be simple to put into place. Others will be more costly, time-consuming and less realistic. It probably won't be possible to use every suggestion, but implementing some of the best ones will send a powerful message to users about how seriously you value their input.

Proving

Talk is cheap. The real value of CRM will become apparent to end users only after its claims have been confirmed through actual experience. It's not easy, but you can build user confidence by demonstrating the system's value in incremental steps.

The easiest way to begin proving the system's effectiveness is through the integration of everyday tools such as calendars and e-mail. If a user is forced to update the calendar on several platforms, he is likely to become frustrated. However, if that same user is able to enter a date on a calendar and then see it automatically updated to the CRM solution, his MS Outlook calendar and his PDA, he will quickly begin to see the real value of the solution.

Another simple way to prove the value of CRM is by embedding business processes within the solution, forcing

end users to make CRM a normal part of their everyday routine. For example, if your company exercises a standard billing process, take the necessary steps to make sure it flows through your CRM rather than running parallel systems until the implementation process has been finalized. Parallel systems are an open invitation for end users to skip the step of running data through CRM and practically ensure that the solution will never be fully accepted as the norm.

Training

Training is all about building user confidence in your CRM. Unless a user is confident in her ability to navigate the basic functions of the system, it is unlikely that she will view the solution in a positive light. Start by training users on the basics and save instruction on advanced features for later, once the users have demonstrated proficiency in the fundamentals.

Managers must understand that the training needs of employees will vary. For example, users who have had experience with similar CRM systems, or who are naturally savvy to their functions, will need less attention. People in charge of training should not assume that just because some employees catch on right away, everyone will magically understand how to use the new system with little training. Providing one training session might do the trick for some, but other users will need multiple sessions before and after implementation.

It's also important to provide periodic refresher courses for users. Over time, it is natural for people to forget some of the system's features. Some employees might not have a use for certain features at the onset, but as their work changes, they may eventually discover they need to perform functions they either never learned about or have forgotten. To help them remember, take time to refresh them on

the basics, offer additional tips and provide instruction on advanced functions not currently being used. Make sure employees feel questions are always welcome. If they don't, they'll be likely to feel ashamed and might go on attempting to do work without essential knowledge.

Rewarding

In an ideal world, the benefits of a new and improved CRM solution would be all that is needed to encourage its use. But in the real world, people are motivated by other types of rewards. The level of the rewards you offer can be anything from a mention in the workplace newsletter to a prize for those who embrace the system most energetically.

This type of recognition will stir enthusiasm in employees who are likely

Talk is cheap. The real value of CRM will become apparent to end users only after its claims have been confirmed through actual experience.

to consider short-term benefits over the long-term benefits that can come from the new system. It will also keep end users who are already using CRM as a vital tool in the workplace encouraged.

Rewarding — combined with communicating, listening, proving and training — can make the difference in deciding end user attitude toward a new CRM system. Launching a system without preparing to be met with resistance puts a great deal of time, money and effort at risk for failure. Change in business is usually not easy, but following these five key steps will help prevent end user revolt. **CIS**

Mike Santoro is the Marketing Manager for Technology Advisors, Inc. (news - alert) (<http://www.techadv.com>), a business solutions consulting company based in Des Plaines, IL. Santoro helps businesses improve sales, marketing and customer service performance.

CRM Solutions:

The Eyebrow Tweezers Or Flamethrower?

Let's take the ever-popular Five-Question Quiz To Determine If You Need CRM!

One, do you like having customers for your business's products or services? Answer "yes" or "no."

Two, do you think that if you took better care of your customers and learned what kinds of things they'd like to buy that, maybe, they'd buy more stuff from you more often? Again, answer either "yes" or "no."

Three, do you think it's a good idea to listen to and learn about your customers to know what kinds of things they want to buy? "Yes" or "no."

Four, would you like to do what it takes to increase revenue or lower costs when it comes to your customers? "Yes" or "no."

And five, can you explain how you'll do that without using a single product name?

Customer relationship management is the idea that if you go out of your way a little bit to treat customers better, and understand more about them and the kinds of things they want to buy, and remember what you know about them and put it where your call center and sales people can see it whenever they need to, the end result is that you'll improve your customer loyalty, customer quality and customer purchases.

And we all know what positive effects that should have.

So yes, every business needs a CRM solution. But not every business needs the same CRM solutions.

First off, technology is not CRM. I'll repeat that: *Technology is not CRM.* Buying stuff before you can explain to a reasonably intelligent 14-year-old exactly — exactly — how it will provide a return

on the investment is not doing CRM. We CRM pros, in our rather abstruse technical industry jargon, call that "feeding your money to the birds."

Determine what you want to do, why you want to do it and how you plan to do it and THEN and ONLY THEN do you call product vendors, learn the difference between "on demand" and "installed," talk budget and IT and such fun stuff.

To wit: Some businesses need better contact management. Customers call in, there's no way to keep track of who calls when or what they said or what was said to them. That same customer calls back a week later wondering what the Sam Hill happened to his stuff, and nobody knows he called last week. Or that the customer is having a Very Bad Day. That's one tool.

Some businesses need better intelligence and analysis. They've got gigabyte upon gigabyte of customer point-of-purchase information, marketing and sales stats, survey results, and they have absolutely no clue how to spin all that straw into bottom-line gold. They rely on someone at a meeting to say "Well, my gut feeling is..."

Some businesses need to get those gigs of info in the right place. Data entered at one point of the company get as lost as a sock in the laundry. Not everyone in the company who needs information can access it when they need to — even though it's in there! We know it is! We just put it in last week! We can hear it breathing!

By David Sims
Contributing Editor, TMCnet

So first ask yourself why. Why do you need CRM? Pretend you're going to a doctor — "Where does it hurt?" Are your revenues too low? Costs too high? Can you tell what kind of customer you want to encourage and which you'd be happy to foist off on your competition? Is your important customer information evaporating? Wondering why you get so little repeat business? That's your pain, and you're feeling it. If you're thinking "Hey, let's get [insert name of current CRM fad], things will really pop around here," you're not ready to start signing checks to vendors.

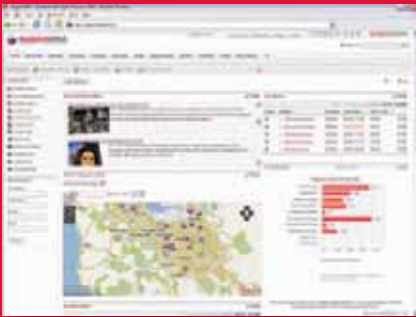
Then ask yourself, "What can I do to solve aforesaid pain?" Lower the per transaction cost? Improve how often and fully you communicate with those who have bought from you? Remember your good customers and do nice things to get them to come back again? Make it so once information is entered into the company's system it gets to the right people at the right time?

Now — this is the crucial part — get a number you would be comfortable with as a return for an investment in a tool to solve your problem. If you figure you'll save a good \$5,000 a year correctly entering point-of-purchase information, you're probably not in the market for a \$50,000 system. Want to raise your customer satisfaction survey results five percentage points? That's perfectly acceptable. Get at least one repeat order every six months from at least twenty percent of your clientele? Fine. You have a number, a target, a goal. A way of telling if your tool is working or not.

Now figure out how you'll do that. (Notice you haven't had to buy anything yet? That's good, you're paying attention.) Eliminate data silos by _____. Get better customer satisfaction feedback earlier by _____. Figure out who our best customers are by knowing _____ and _____. Spend less per sales call by _____.

Now you should have a pretty clear picture of the tool you're looking for, whether it looks more like eyebrow tweezers or a flamethrower. Because...you'd sure hate to need one and have the other, wouldn't you? **CIS**

David Sims is a contributing editor for TMCnet.



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Customer Inter@ction Solutions Magazine's Twenty-Second Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking



This is the twenty-second year *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine brings you its “Top 50” Teleservices Agencies Ranking. In this issue, we’re presenting the “Top 50” outbound portion of the ranking. (The inbound portion of the ranking will be highlighted in the April 2007 issue.) Since its inception in 1986, our “Top 50” ranking has been used as the benchmark for choosing large-capacity/sized teleservices agencies.

Ranking Basis

Since the basis of our ranking is company size, *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* uses a measurable, *third-party-verifiable* aspect of teleservices to arrive at our list of the “Top 50” agencies: *the number of minutes each agency was billed* by each of its phone companies for telephone service for 12 months, encompassing November 2005 through October 2006. We have found this to be an accurate and reliable reflection of the amount of teleservices each agency does, and therefore, provides a true reflection of its size.

Qualification Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in this year’s “Top 50,” the agencies were required to answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes between November 2005 and October 2006. The questionnaire had to be verified with the signature of each agency’s president/CEO. In addition, each agency had to submit a letter of verification

from each of its telephone service providers certifying the number of minutes for which it billed the agency during the designated period. (Our sincere gratitude is extended to all the carriers for their thorough and expeditious provision of these data.)

Exceptions

Agencies that did not supply this third-party verification were disqualified, with the exception of three circumstances: 1) a client of the service agency was billed directly for its telephone service and would not provide a letter of verification for anonymity reasons; 2) part of the billable minutes were with a foreign telecommunications carrier that could not provide the data by the deadline; 3) legitimate business situations prevented an agency from obtaining verification from certain of its carriers or a certain carrier. For each of these circumstances, we allow the company to certify *a portion* of the missing minutes with a letter of explanation and signed verification of bill-

able minutes pertaining to the explanation from the president/CEO of the agency. You will find an asterisk next to the name of all “Top 50” agencies that supplied a portion of their verification from their president/CEO due to one of the three circumstances identified above.

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

Understanding The Listings

As you read through the list of outbound “Top 50” agencies, you will notice that we have provided a numerical ranking of 1 through 30 (1 being the largest), but have not revealed the number of billable minutes used to arrive at this ordering. This was done out of respect for the confidential nature of this information to the many agencies included here that are privately held corporations. This year, only 30 companies met with our minimum criteria of billable minutes to be included in the outbound ranking.

You will notice that the outbound ranking has been divided into two cate-

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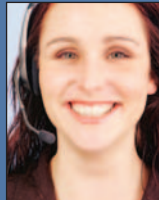
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gories: A and B. Category A is composed of U.S. service agencies whose primary business function is provision of telemarketing services for outside firms. If you are considering an international teleservices campaign, Category B consists of international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

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

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

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CATEGORY A

1. SITEL Corp.; Omaha, NE † *
 (A ClientLogic company)
 Ph: 800-445-6600; Fx: 402-963-4902
 Web: <http://www.sitel.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1985
 Size of projects accepted:
 Minimum 2,500 hours
 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 30%; B-to-C: 70%
 Outbound: 30%; Inbound: 68%;
 Interactive Inbound: 2%
 Specialization: Customer care/technical support; customer acquisition; business process outsourcing

2. InfoCision Management Corp.
 Ph: 330-668-1400; Fx: 330-668-1401
 Web: <http://www.infocision.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1982
 Size of projects accepted:
 Minimum 500 hours
 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 10%; B-to-C: 90%
 Outbound: 80%; Inbound: 20%
 Specialization: political, non-profit and religious fundraising; product/service sales and customer care; volunteer recruitment

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

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

5. DialAmerica Marketing, Inc.
<http://www.dialamerica.com>

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

7. Influent Inc. †
 Ph: 614-280-1600; Fx: 614-280-1610
 Web: <http://www.influentinc.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1992
 Size of projects accepted: Negotiable
 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 19.5%; B-to-C: 80.5%
 Outbound: 79.8%; Inbound: 20.2%
 Specialization: Insurance; business-to-business; enhancement services

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

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

10. TCIM Services, Inc.
<http://www.tcim.com>

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

12. The Heritage Company, Inc.
<http://www.theheritagecompany.com>

13. Charlton
<http://www.tcgcorp.net>

14. ClientLogic † *
 Ph: 615-301-7100; Fx: 615-301-7150
 Web: <http://www.clientlogic.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1990
 Size of projects accepted: Varies
 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 10%; B-to-C: 90%
 Outbound: 5%; Inbound: 93%;
 Interactive Inbound: 2%
 Specialization: Customer care services; technical support; sales and retention solutions

15. Epixtar †
<http://www.epixtar.com>

16. 121 Direct Response (Tele-Response Center, Inc.)
<http://www.121directresponse.com>

17. American Customer Care, Inc.
<http://www.americancustomercares.com>

18. OKS-Ameridial Inc. †
<http://www.oksameridial.com>

19. Hamilton Contact Center Services
<http://www.hamiltontm.com>

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

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

22. AnswerNet Network
<http://www.answer.net>

23. Greene, an RMG Direct Company
<http://www.rmgdirectinc.com>

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

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

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

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

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

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

30. Telerx † *
<http://www.telerx.com>

CATEGORY B — INTERNATIONAL

1. Teleperformance
<http://www.teleperformance.com>

2. Intelenet *
<http://www.intelenetglobal.com>

3. SITEL Corp.; Omaha, NE *
 (A ClientLogic company)
 Ph: 800-445-6600; Fx: 402-963-4902
 Web: <http://www.sitel.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1985
 Size of projects accepted:
 Minimum 2,500 hours
 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 30%; B-to-C: 70%
 Outbound: 30%; Inbound: 68%;
 Interactive Inbound: 2%
 Specialization: Customer care/technical support; customer acquisition; business process outsourcing

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

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

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

7. ClientLogic *
 Ph: 615-301-7100; Fx: 615-301-7150
 Web: <http://www.clientlogic.com>
 Year began providing teleservices: 1990
 Size of projects accepted: Varies
 Type of calling:
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Interactive Inbound: 2%
 Specialization: Customer care services; technical support; sales and retention solutions

8. Epixtar
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 Ph: 614-280-1600; Fx: 614-280-1610
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 Type of calling:
 B-to-B: 19.5%; B-to-C: 80.5%
 Outbound: 79.8%; Inbound: 20.2%
 Specialization: Insurance; business-to-business; enhancement services

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18. OKS-Ameridial Inc.
<http://www.oksameridial.com>

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<http://www.htc.to>

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No Longer Just About Outbound:

A Moment With Stratasoft's New CEO

In business since 1995, Houston-based Stratasoft Inc. is a computer telephony/call center software provider with a comprehensive patent portfolio that includes predictive dialing, predictive dialing algorithms, contact center database management, contact center campaign scripting and contact center management systems. Stratasoft has customers in over 20 countries and 28,000 seats worldwide. Historically, the company has predominantly been known as an outbound — code word for “dialer” — company.

I recently got a chance to catch up with Asim Saber, the newly appointed CEO of Stratasoft. ([news - alert](#)) Saber wanted to tell me about a challenge recently won by Stratasoft — against industry giant Aspect.

“In October,” said Saber, “Stratasoft was invited to go head-to-head for a 3,000-plus seat contract for a Fortune 500 company with Aspect. We won. To be invited to compete against Aspect was an honor, and winning was especially gratifying.”

I asked Saber why he thought Stratasoft had performed so admirably against Aspect which, though not precisely a household name, holds a great reputation in the contact center industry.

“It was the flexibility of the system and the ability of the client to be able to change, in real time, on the fly, screens, add programs and do different edits as far as list management. That was probably the biggest key. From a functionality perspective, we're 95 percent of each other [Stratasoft and Aspect] for inbound and outbound functionality, though our clients say we have the best answering machine detection,” said Saber.

“We have beefed up our product development staff — from 3 to 21 — and we're adding more people as we go. To our customer service, we've added 500 percent to our help desk functionalities.”

Saber also spoke about one of Stratasoft's largest recent deployments.

“TRG (The Resource Group), based in Washington, DC, is a large teleservices agency with about 4,000 seats worldwide: 60 percent inbound to 40 percent outbound. We are in the process of converting all those seats to Stratasoft. For the first time in Stratasoft's history, we have owner-operators. We're going to be putting a lot of pressure on ourselves as far as functionality to handle 4,000-plus seat type environments.”

So what's next for Stratasoft, as it seems to be pursuing a bit of self-reinvention?

Saber answered, “We're looking at competitive platforms to see what it is

we don't have, and trying to pursue that with our own development, or perhaps acquire some companies.”

I asked him about workforce management. “Everybody's doing it,” I said.

Saber acknowledged that this is a technology Stratasoft currently lacks. He also spoke of other advances in the pipeline for the company.

“We are in the process of developing a true skills-based routing (inbound) solution, which they are now testing. In the future, they [R&D] plan to create the ultimate soft switch platform, which is in the works.”

“We've started a hosting facility, as well,” added Saber. “Similar to what Five9 or TouchStar Software does. We're going to make agreements with carriers' data centers to collocate services with them. That's a new service offering for us. We're one of the only companies that has the capability to offer all functionality in our CPE environment in a hosted environment.”

“We were just awarded a patent in July for the technology...if you have a supervisor in a remote location, we can transport voice and data on very low bandwidth, so the only part of the screen that changes gets transported, so the whole screen doesn't need to refresh.”

Outbound (primarily dialers) was the foundation technology in the past for Stratasoft. In these days of increased regulation over outbound (not to mention its bad rep in the media and with the general public), I asked Saber how the company's outbound business was doing, and if it was dying, as many people predicted was the fate of outbound several years ago.

“Not at all,” said Saber. “We find the split between inbound and outbound is still about 60/40, or even 50/50.”

In other words — and market data have thus far borne this fact out — reports of the death of outbound are greatly exaggerated.

And Stratasoft is no longer just a dialer company. **CIS**

By Tracey E. Schelmetic

Editorial Director, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

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Beyond the Humble Reader Board:

Display Technologies Roundup

Display Technologies Providers

NEC

<http://www.necunifiedsolutions.com>

Spectrum Corp.

<http://www.specorp.com>

Symon Communications, Inc.

<http://www.symon.com>

Telecorp Products, Inc.

<http://www.telecorpproducts.com>

Telegenix

<http://www.telegenix.com>

Texas Digital Systems, Inc.

<http://www.txdigital.com>

Along with the modest headset and the unassuming ergonomic chair, a call center's message board may be the next most critical but often underappreciated piece of equipment. Large reader boards have been used in call centers for decades to collect data from the ACD and display the information to keep call center employees and managers apprised, at a glance, of whether they were "on" or "off" at any given moment. In the 1980s, the boards offered one-size-fits-all information, and if you weren't in the board's direct line of sight, you had a problem. You moved.

Today, the call center wall board, while essentially the same in its functionality, may not be offering up the same old statistics. It may not be on the wall. It may not even be in the call center, if the call center is virtual, home-based or in a small office on the other side of the world.

Display technologies, as the umbrella term goes nowadays, are responsible for keeping track of a host of call center sta-

tistics from an array of data sources: not only the ACD, but from IP contact center platforms, workforce management systems and scheduling software, CRM systems, call recording solutions and more. Neither are display technologies "one-size-fits-all": data can be customized from day-to-day, hour-to-hour or even person-to-person. After all, what an agent wants to see is probably not always the same as what a supervisor wants to see and vice-versa. The COO may want to see much more than the supervisor. And she may want to see it from the other side of the country.

While most medium to large-sized call centers today retain the familiar wall-mounted boards (though they, too, have changed in appearance from the old days), the information can also be replicated on agents', managers' and supervisors' desktops. The data can take

on extra importance, should thresholds be crossed or not met, and be turned into screen pops and alerts, e-mails, alarms and phone calls. The information may reveal weaknesses with certain individual agents, work groups or call center locations, prompting extra training. The data yielded by the display/reader board system can be communicated wirelessly to handheld devices such as PDAs, allowing management to keep track of the statistics anywhere and at any time.

Many companies produce reader boards: think of the boards in stock exchanges all over the world, or large city information boards like that found in Times Square in New York. Fewer companies dedicate all or part of their product line to meet the unique needs of call centers. Above is a selection of companies that specialize in the call center market. We encourage you to peruse these companies' Web sites to learn more about how their products may advantageously match your company's needs. **CIS**

By Tracey E. Schelmetic
Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions



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How Important is SEO?

It has been said that if you aren't on the first page of search engines for the terms in which your focus, you don't exist. While this may seem like an impossible statement to quantify, studies have shown that 80% of searchers do not go beyond page three of search results.

Source: iProspect Press Release, Search Engine Marketing Firm iProspect Survey Confirms Importance of Visibility on the First Three Pages of Search Results 4.20.04

Join TMC's SEO program. Contact Vartan Khazadian, 203-852-6800 ext.121, e-mail vkhazadian@tmcnet.com, or Marjorie Dormevil, 203-852-6800 ext. 125, e-mail mdormevil@tmcnet.com to learn more.

Deploying Digital Signage In Your Company

Chances are pretty good that you have already thought about a plasma or LCD screen for your home or business. With manufacturers constantly facing competitive pressures on cost, the true winner is definitely the consumer, in both the private and commercial sectors. HDTV (high-definition television) broadcasting has entered the mainstream, and satellite and cable companies are constantly in the news. Today, let's focus on the planning stages necessary for a business requirement to display information to your employees and even your customers using display technologies.

Common Display Devices

There are many display choices, but let's focus on four common display devices practical for the enterprise:

- LCD (slim, lightweight panels, a good choice for a brightly lighted room because reflections are minimal);
- Plasma (known for accurate colors, deep blacks and minimal blurring of fast motion with a wide viewing angle to ensure good sight lines);
- LED wallboards (intense LEDs have a great viewing distance, a long life span and rugged construction); and
- PC (desktop or laptop, for personal viewing, streaming video, anytime, anywhere).

LCDs and plasmas (new television installations are becoming rare) used in the enterprise are most often found in areas with moving traffic such as lobbies, break rooms and hallways. They can be used for wayfinding, advertising and branding, company news and information and entertainment purposes.

There are many options for corporate communications including video wall configurations and media player options that get the images out to the displays. The very presence of digital signage with vivid and dynamic video gets the attention of the viewer and gets your messaging across quickly and efficiently.

If your original idea was for one plasma or LCD in a large room that multitudes of employees will view (like a typical contact center), consider this: the viewing angle, size of font and screen layout affect the line of sight and distance from which the viewer can easily read the information. A much better solution is multiple plasmas or LCDs (remember the competitive pricing), strategically placed. However, plasma screens can suffer from burn-in, which is caused by images that remain



onscreen with the same content and in the same position for a long time. Contact centers use displays to show call statistics and usually have static headers or logos that can quickly cause burn-in on a plasma. This can be alleviated by changing layouts often, which also makes the screen more appealing to viewers, or using LCDs, which are a bit more expensive than plasmas but are not as sensitive to burn-in.

An even better solution for a contact center is an LED display commonly called a reader board or a wallboard. Wallboards have been around for over 25 years and are still very popular in contact centers and other industries. The intensity of the LEDs makes it easy to read the messaging from great distances and from many different sight lines. LEDs have a long life span and the new generation of wallboards will certainly be on par with flat panels, offering full motion video and graphics capabilities.

Another way to get the same messaging found on display panels out to those employees who may be out of sight of the displays or out of the office is the

By Bob Brittan
Symon Communications Inc.



PC desktop (or laptop). It is convenient today with streaming media to the PC to get any type of messaging out to your remote employees. Real-time alerting and messaging to the PC has been around for many years, and technology today enables your employees to get company messaging and information from the Web.

Content Is King

Planning for your first digital signage solution requires an understanding of the end result. If “content is king,” you must be sure that your business and client objectives determine the content. The content determines the technology solution and related considerations that follow with the implementation of your solution. Most digital signage implementations are passive experiences in which the content is presented and the viewer is expected to passively watch it. This puts added pressure on the content creators to craft a message that is sufficient to keep viewers’ attention and incite them to take specific actions.

Business requirements alone do not determine content strategy. Other con-

siderations to think about include the environment and indoor placement and resulting ambient noise. Who is your audience? Are they transient, captive at their desks or waiting in a queue? What is their mind set? You will need to get your IT department involved and discuss the infrastructure and your requirements for DSL, satellite, WAN/LAN and the bandwidth to make it all happen. After you have decided on your display type, you must consider mode (portrait or landscape), aspect ratio (screen resolution) and screen placement. Work with a knowledgeable media consultant vendor that offers professional services to take you through these steps and turn your digital signage vision into a reality.

Return On Investment

If you are not the ultimate decision maker but are aware of the high value and benefit in a digital signage deployment, you will probably be asked about the ROI. Digital signage has a different structure and may have a soft ROI but it definitely has a hard

ROO (return on objective). Your original reasons for a digital signage solution will have unique objectives. Some ideas to substantiate a ROO include experiential benefits that enhance the overall viewer experience, making the emotional connection with company visitors or consumer, and mitigating perceived long wait times in just about any situation.

Some other benefits:

- Instantly communicate with all employees, 24/7;
- Offer one consistent voice with one consistent message;
- Create messages tailored to the specific audience;
- Create a workforce of “brand ambassadors”;

- Strengthen crisis communication plans;
- Effectively distribute HR and business announcements; and
- Automate real-time delivery of key business data.

Brand Management

There is also the promise of brand management, and in these days of MCI and Enron, keeping corporate promises and trust has an entirely new meaning. You can now be forthcoming and share pertinent information that develops trust and builds brand leverage while educating your employees and customers. Digital signage is also used for associate training and communication and, with dynamic content, keeping viewers aware and informed.

Contact centers use displays to show call statistics and usually have static headers or logos that can quickly cause burn-in on a plasma. This can be alleviated by changing layouts often, which also makes the screen more appealing to viewers, or using LCDs, which are a bit more expensive than plasmas but are not as sensitive to burn-in.

Your digital signage deployment needs to be driven by well thought out business objectives. The content strategy will drive the decisions surrounding the software and hardware and related considerations for your dynamic digital signage network. Turn your office or business into an informed showcase by adding strategically placed digital signage that displays dynamic meaningful content to your appropriate audiences. **CIS**

Symon Communications, Inc. ([news - alert](http://www.symon.com)) (<http://www.symon.com>) is a privately held technology company and a provider of real-time and digital communication solutions. Products include reporting, messaging and alerting systems along with an advanced infrastructure providing a message creation and digital display environment with advanced text, graphic and scheduling capabilities.

Investing In SIP For The Contact Center

It's universal — nobody likes to wait. When you want something — whether it's an answer to a critical question, the newest gadget or an important decision — you want it right now! That's the way it is across all demographic groups. It's the same for your customers, who expect your business to be responsive and helpful. And, of course, your customers also count on getting this service 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

As a result, the days of the “phone only” call center, and the phone and e-mail contact center for that matter, are severely limited because these media alone just won't deliver the customer service results you need to stay competitive. The good news is, your wait is over. You can invest in SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) for your contact center to help your business solve problems and make decisions immediately, and you can significantly expand the opportunities you have for richer, dynamic collaboration. You'll transform your contact center from merely talking to working together with customers to form and strengthen profitable relationships. Because your business will be exceedingly responsive, your customers' wait will be over, too.

Solve Problems And Make Decisions Immediately

SIP ([define](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)) boosts your contact center communications capabilities and minimizes the previous hurdles to incorporating new means of communication like video, Web collaboration

and instant messaging (IM) so you can shift your contact center quickly into the next generation. SIP is the first protocol designed from the beginning to support and simplify multimedia communications and to free communications from being device-dependent. SIP, therefore, is exactly what your contact center and business needs to maximize flexibility and optimize effectiveness. You'll eliminate wasted time, be able to find the best expert to answer customer questions, and become more relevant, valuable and unique to your customers. Your contact center will be able to solve problems and make decisions immediately — increasing first-contact resolution to enhance customer loyalty and lower operating costs, producing happy customers, employees and management.

SIP brings a wealth of capabilities that add vibrant dimensions to your business communications: dimensions that you simply cannot reach without it.

By Betsy Wood and Shane O'Neill
Nortel



SIP, which works with IP networks, does for multimedia communications what HTTP did for the Internet — make it simple. When you browse the Web, you just surf. You don't have to know what protocol you're using or think about how to get where you're going. SIP, similarly, streamlines multimedia communications set-up, facilitates vital collaboration by adding a presence capability so you know when someone is available on the network, provides a single address for all communication and supports multiple modes of communication during a single session. SIP also enables a universal approach that crosses enterprise and service provider, wired and wireless networks — another reason to include SIP. Ultimately SIP helps your contact center and organization become more customer-focused and to move beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Move Far Beyond VoIP

VoIP ([define](#) - [news](#) - [alert](#)) gives your contact center a tremendously flexible converged network that's easier to man-



age, but it's focused on your infrastructure and not vital and dynamic customer collaboration. VoIP just isn't good enough on its own. You need to move far beyond with SIP to create a substantial difference for your customers.

Let's take a look at a couple of scenarios that illustrate the difference. VoIP lets you build a virtual contact center and gives you the freedom to locate employees wherever it makes sense: in your headquarters, in branches or at home. You can pool resources, which helps you answer customer requests faster, but it doesn't add any new functionality to take your contact center to the next level and to the next generation.

SIP, on the other hand, empowers your contact center far beyond incremental improvement and gives you an advanced, multi-dimensional palette. Your business gains a tremendous edge by initiating meaningful and immediate communications. For example, you can leverage presence to invigorate teamwork and look at customer service in an entirely new light.

Now your employees can work anywhere — even at home — and have a superb set of tools at their fingertips. SIP facilitates collaboration by adding presence to these tools, so it's effortless to know which team members or specialists are available right now to help. Whether you utilize IM, video conferencing or white boarding to solve problems, your customers get their answers right away, so first-contact resolution increases and everybody wins.

Your employees can customize presence information so it provides colleagues with more detailed information such as “in a team meeting.” Options are extensive, so they can easily be tailored to your particular situation. Additional personalization features let users manage contact screening, contact logging and picture caller I.D. Individuals can also modify contact routing based upon caller name, number, time-of-day, day-of-week and priority — to ring any communications device or several simultaneously. Additional capabilities provide further flexibility to contact handling, so many situations can be covered. This combination of tools translates into a more adaptable work environment, which boosts your employee productivity.

Strengthen Bonds With Your Customers

It's tough to compete if your business can't intelligently and effectively handle customer requests and provide unique proactive services that impart superior value. SIP makes this much easier than before. For example, you could integrate video kiosks into your current contact points and significantly enhance service. Connecting your customers and employees via video helps you convey very complex information faster and more clearly. Video engages customers and increases understanding, and seeing eye-to-eye builds trust that strengthens bonds.

Demonstration and discussion replace description. You can supply advanced technical help, expand self-service options considerably, review products, fill out applications or provide more complex services. And, with video, customer identification is instantaneous, which improves security. Your objective is to offer the same superior service to all your customers effortlessly no matter what device your customer uses. Help customers immediately and you positively affect your customer retention and loyalty notably while reducing your operating costs — an extremely beneficial combination to your business.

With SIP, instantaneous collaboration using any device is automatic and device-independent, so you don't have

SIP empowers your contact center far beyond incremental improvement and gives you advanced, multi-dimensional communications immediately.

to worry about how your customers and employees connect. Need to move from a phone call to interactive video during an interaction? It's effortless, because SIP lets you adapt dynamically. Additionally, once you have a SIP-based contact center, you can make wait time more advantageous to your customers and your business. You can clarify technical issues or deliver better instructions using video messaging. Offer personalized music options, present forms to fill in or deliver customized video clips. Because you craft individual, contextual treatments, these become unique, relevant opportunities that customers appreciate and your business optimizes each interaction. This is just the beginning of the tremendous versatility SIP demon-

strates. Invest in SIP for your contact center and your business will gain an agile foundation for ongoing innovation and competitive advantage.

Invest In Your Customers For Competitive Advantage

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- Utilizing SIP, a bank can provide help and more complex services like loans at current ATM locations, and customers can reach anyone at the bank for a video conference. Customers like the new options, so retention is increased, and banking services are expanded significantly without building new branches.
- A mobile phone provider offers the same level of superior service for video calls as it does today for phone calls. Service is further enhanced by delivering personalized, informational video clips, podcasts and/or video messages to the same mobile phone customers.
- A rural medical clinic provides better patient care by using video calls to help with diagnosis. This keeps patients close to home, causing less stress on the patient and his family.
- A large building supply store has experts available to consult with customers during home improvement projects. Tough problems get solved right away, reducing the pressure on customer service reps and making customers much happier.
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Betsy Wood is currently an Evangelist with Nortel (<http://www.nortel.com>) (quote - news - alert) Multimedia Applications, where she is part of a global team helping companies foster customer relationships and enhance teamwork. She is a frequent speaker and writer about the strategic value of collaborative customer contact to businesses.

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

Looks Like JetBlue Picked The Wrong Day To Quit Sniffing Glue



By now, everybody knows of the [JetBlue \(news - alert\)](#) debacle. The airline kept planes full of people on iced runways for up to 10 hours last month and canceled up to 1,000 flights during and in the week following a nasty winter storm that blew through much of the central and eastern part of the country, particularly New York's JFK airport, JetBlue's hub. There were reports of parents running out of diapers for their children and being forced to tear up clothing to make impromptu nappies. The planes ran out of food, the toilets clogged up. Some passengers and members of the news media began uttering phrases like "kidnapping" and "unlawful imprisonment."

It took the airline a week to get back on schedule. Estimates regarding how much it will cost JetBlue reach up to \$30 million in refunds and vouchers. The chairman of Jet Blue, David Neeleman, did everything short of getting on his knees and weeping and beating his breast in his groveling apologies, and the airline has proposed a Customer Bill of Rights (which can be viewed at <http://www.tmcnet.com/474.1>) so future nightmares of this magnitude don't happen again. Both are good steps. (Someone in the company must have been reading the case study that details the picture-perfect handling by Johnson & Johnson of the cyanide-laced Tylenol deaths back in 1982. The skillful way Johnson & Johnson handled that incident is still discussed in business schools today as the pinnacle of public relations.)

But what I'm wondering is this: all the news articles mentioned the weather, the tarmac, the planes and FAA rules that disallow flight crews from flying for longer than a certain amount of hours, limiting the amount of flights that can take off.

But surely, this being a storm beyond anyone's control, why did only JetBlue stumble so badly? If those reasons listed above were the only reasons, all the airlines that regularly fly out of JFK should have been in the same boat.

But they weren't.

Which implies internal management/customer service problems — but nobody said too much about those.

The airline acknowledged that it failed to cancel flights in advance, when they knew the storm was approaching, which left an abnormal amount of planes grounded at JFK airport and its reservation system hopelessly overloaded. But surely all the other airlines had hopelessly overloaded reservation systems, too.

The reason I'm so interested is that JetBlue used to be ranked number one in terms of customer service. Those of us who have high hopes for the home agent model are (or have been) pleased by this news: JetBlue's customer service agents are almost entirely home-based. The company's high ranking in customer service seemed to vindicate and recommend the home agent model.

Now this. How do you go from the top of the heap to the pit in the cellar with Precious in one day?

Did something break?

Among reports that some callers were left on hold for longer than an hour, the airline admitted that its network of approximately 2,000 agents, most of them home-based, were unable to handle the flood of angry calls.

Aha. Why not?

Additionally, partnership arrangements with competitive carriers to offload passengers onto other carriers' flights (a practice known as "inter-lining") are expensive to forge, and it is apparently not unusual for low-cost carriers such as JetBlue to skip these arrangements.

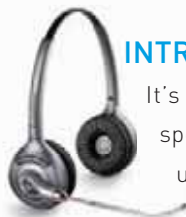
Aha again. Low-cost solutions, just like budget airlines, work great when everything goes right. But cut operations too fine on the side of cost containment, and the proverbial excrement hits the fan (at this point, it's hard not to conjure up images from the movie *Airplane!*, but that's not important right now) when something catastrophic occurs.

Will JetBlue recover? Most certainly. The airline has many fans and over the years it has done a lot of things right, which will go a long way toward inducing its loyal customers to forgive a slip-up, even one of this magnitude. The company seems genuinely contrite and eager to fix the elements that went wrong. Will things have to change, including its customer service processes and its disaster recovery methodologies? Again, most certainly. Will it be quite as cheap as it was before? Who knows. The money's going to have to come from somewhere to strengthen the call center and back-office structure so such a thing doesn't happen again. Would any of the large U.S. carriers, most of whom are frequently lambasted for marginal customer service, be as forgiven as JetBlue will be? Not a chance. I still haven't forgiven American Airlines for deciding not to hand out even a microscopic bag of pretzels anymore.

There's a moral here somewhere: treat your customers well 99 percent of the time, and they'll forgive you — in time — when you do screw up the other one percent. **CIS**

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