TMC®

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

November 2007 • Vol. 26/No. 6
www.cismag.com

26 Years of Excellence

#1 In CRM, Call Centers And Teleservices Since 1982™

Tips From MICROSOFT

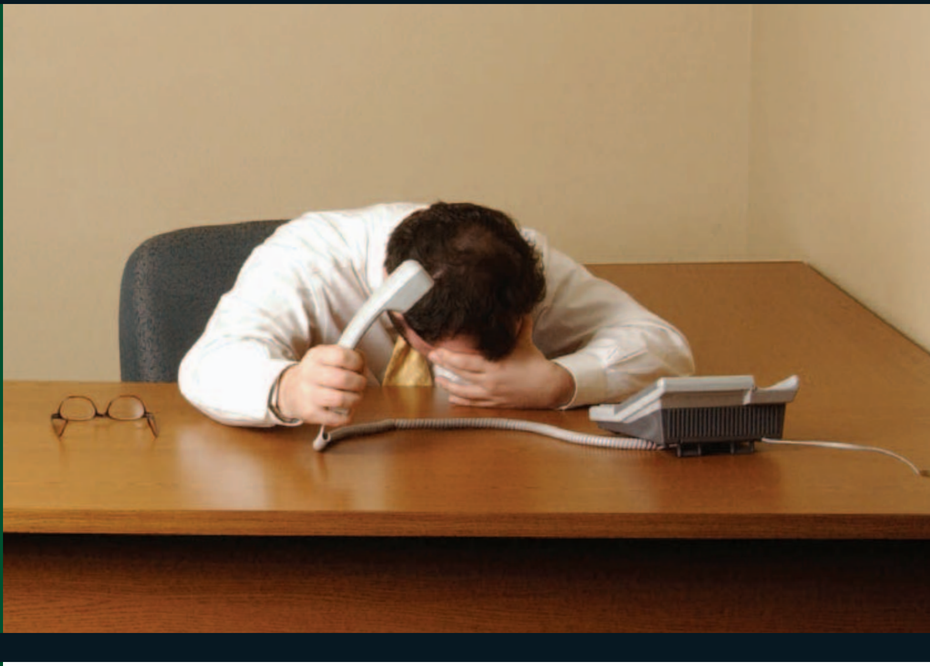
Turning Customers Into Their Own Call Center Agents

Also In This Issue:

- The Best Regulation Is Self-Regulation
- Raising The Bar On CRM Standards
- A Practical Guide To Seasonal Call Center Staffing

If you value your customers…

…why do you keep them ON HOLD?



With InfoCision, they won't be. We answer your calls quickly and develop a lasting relationship with your customers. A few minutes on the phone with InfoCision means a lifetime of customer loyalty for you.

9 seconds
Average time to answer inbound calls.

92 percent
Percent of inbound calls answered in 20 seconds or less.

3 percent
Overall percent of inbound calls abandoned.

InfoCision
THE highest quality call center company in the world!®*

Contact us at 1-866-670-4IMC | www.infocision.com

InfoCision Management Corporation 25 years 1982 - 2007

*InfoCision is the only teleservice company to win the MVP Quality Award, presented by *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine, all 14 years since its inception.

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

THE BEST REGULATION IS SELF-REGULATION

As the industry's first and pioneering magazine since 1982, which laid the foundation for today's trillion-dollar call/contact and CRM center industries, it has always been our paramount responsibility to provide not only outstanding quality editorial, but also to protect the industry and advocate what is in its best interest.

Over the last 15 years, in many of these editorials, industry keynotes and conventions, I have always stated that, "**The best regulation is self-regulation.**"

In the early 1990s, when our industry was growing at a phenomenal rate, the b-to-c sector of the telemarketing/contact center industry got out of hand, and in particular, the inexperienced "Johnny Come Latelys" irritated many consumers, resulting in Congressional considerations to restrict the so-called "abusers."

Back then, the relevant associations of our industry were too weak, too political, or simply unwilling to endorse my idea of self-regulation and, therefore, nothing was done. As a result, many harmful regulations, including DNC legislation, were passed.

As I had predicted in many of my editorials, "If the legislators get involved, they could potentially destroy our great industry." Unfortunately, my advice fell on deaf ears and the associations, whose job it is to guide and protect the industry, had NO foresight to see what was coming from the legislators. Therefore, the damage was done!!

Fortunately, The Glass Is Half Full!

In the past years, I never wrote about the associations because I felt they didn't seem to care or anticipate the future needs of the industry.

But today, I am very happy to share with you that ATA (American Teleservices Association), under the capable leadership of my esteemed colleague, Tim Searcy, and his outstanding staff and board of directors (most of whom I have known for many years), has cleaned house, and the association is currently working on extremely vital initiatives such as SRO (self-regulatory organizations). I say, it is about time our association started to focus on REAL issues.

I must also say that I like very much ATA's three criteria for self-regulation, but I would like to suggest a fourth; that is: Teleservices companies must agree and sign an agreement that guarantees self-regulation in full compliance with the ATA guidelines, that random checking must be done to verify compliance, and violators MUST face the consequences. Having said that, as good as the concept of self-regulation is, I continue to believe that the implementation and enforcement will be extremely challenging. In a worst-case scenario, it could be nearly impossible.

ATA's Position On SRO

I asked Tim Searcy, the CEO of ATA, to comment on his initiatives in the area of self-regulation. Here are his comments:

(An excerpt from Tim Searcy's State of the ATA, presented at the 2007 ATA Convention & Expo in Scottsdale, Arizona)

There once was a little boy and his mother who lived at the edge of a great canyon. One day, the little boy and his mother were in their kitchen baking cookies when they began to argue. The boy grew frustrated and fled from the home to the ridge of the canyon and yelled at the top of his lungs, "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!" And then the canyon echoed back, "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!" The boy became very upset, and ran back into his home to his mother.

"Mother! There's a boy outside who hates me!"

"Tell him you love him," the boy's mother replied.

The boy returned to the ridge of the mountain and yelled, "I love you! I love you! I love you!" And the echo replied, "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

For too many years, teleservices has been treating its marketplace much like the boy yelling into the canyon by not providing what it wants — and without respect, and as if it had little value. And, in turn, the marketplace has responded with the same treatment it has received from the industry.

Although the example is a hyperbole, and many partners in the industry are strong advocates for the consumer, the truth remains. Consumers are justifiably frustrated with the way they are treated and have responded with equally painful treatment to us.

The American Teleservices Association (ATA) holds the same role and purpose as the boy's mother: to help the teleservices industry communicate more positively and effectively and to deliver what it wants to receive in return from all of the constituents in the canyon. Our canyon includes consumers, legislators, regulators, teleservices users and clients. We have already had one case of the marketplace demanding change, and that came in the form of the do-not-call registry.

Four years have passed since DNC became commonplace in teleservices' culture. Currently, there are over 140 million phone numbers on the do-not-call registry. There have been numerous actions and reactions from regulators in the form of fines, compliance and operational change.

So, the voice of consumer — the media — what are "they" asking today and how are we responding?

The first question typically asked is pretty standard: How big is the ATA?

ATA currently represents more than 4,000 contact centers employing over 1.8 million professionals in the U.S. and over 50 foreign countries.

How Has DNC Changed The Industry?

In a DNC world, there is, quite naturally, significantly more money spent on compliance solutions. In addition, the industry as a whole must now focus more carefully on their market and better target their audience: those consumers who have not registered their phone numbers on the DNC registry. The positive outcome from this is an increase in the response rate for outbound calling to the remaining households. Outsourcing has seen an incredible increase, though the number of in-house operations has declined. Today, the total number of contact center employees in the U.S. is 5.2 million. That is a decrease of 1.3 million from the 6.5 million employed within the industry before DNC.

Where Are The Regulators Going Next?

It is interesting that this question gets asked about the regulators, when in fact, the regulators aren't going anywhere — state legislators are going everywhere! Since DNC, the states have proposed legislation on "do not solicit," "do not mail," mandatory queue time announcements, eliminating the "established business relationship" exception, "0 for live operator" and more. It's the states we need to direct our attention to now.

What Is Your Political Action Committee (ATA-PAC) Up To?

Over the last few years, the ATA-PAC generated between $20,000 and $30,000 per year and supported those individuals friendly to teleservices. These efforts provided ATA unprecedented access to Congress and gave us a strong voice on Capitol Hill.

This year, the ATA-PAC stands to raise nearly $100,000, and the goal for 2008 is twice that. The focus and determination of the ATA-PAC during this growth period is to gain additional recognition of our Petition which clarifies that the FCC has exclusive regulatory jurisdiction over interstate commerce by phone, and the states' authority regulates only intrastate calling. The ATA-PAC is also focusing diligently on creating a strong dialog with the states and regulators

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

Executive Group Publisher
Nadji Tehrani (ntehrani@tmcnet.com)

Group Publisher
Richard Tehrani (rtehrani@tmcnet.com)

Editorial
203-852-6800 (cispress@tmcnet.com)
Editorial Director, Tracey E. Schelmetic
Associate Editor, Patrick Barnard

TMC™ Labs
203-852-6800 (tmclabs@tmcnet.com)
Executive Technology Editor/CTO/VP, Tom Keating

Art
203-852-6800 (cisart@tmcnet.com)
Creative Director, Alan Urkawich
Graphic Designer, Lisa A. Mellers

Executive Officers:
Nadji Tehrani, *Chairman and CEO*
Richard Tehrani, *President*
Dave Rodriguez, *VP of Publications & Conferences*
Michael Genaro, *VP of Marketing*
Tom Keating, *VP, CTO*

To Subscribe, Call: 203-852-6800

Or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Digital Subscriptions free for qualified U.S., Canadian and Foreign subscribers. Print Subscriptions free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, $49. All Canadian subscribers, $49. All Foreign (air mail), $85. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

Circulation Director, Shirley Russo (srusso@tmcnet.com)

Reader Input: *CIS* encourages readers to contact us with their questions, comments and suggestions. Send e-mail (addresses above), contact our Web site (www.cismag.com) or send mail.

We reserve the right to edit letters for clarity and brevity. All submissions will be considered eligible for publication unless otherwise specified by the author.

Reprints: For authorized reprints of articles appearing in *CIS*, please contact Reprint Management Services at 1-800-290-5460 or e-mail them at tmcnet@reprintbuyer.com.

Lists: For list rentals, please contact Glenn Freedman at glennf@l-i-s-t.com or call 516-358-5478, ext. 101.

Advertising Sales: 203-852-6800

Karl Sundstrom, ext. 119 (ksundstrom@tmcnet.com)
Senior Advertising Director
Eastern, Western, International

Exhibit Sales: 203-852-6800
Global Events Account Directors
Companies whose names begin with:
A-G or #s: Maureen Gambino (mgambino@tmcnet.com)
H-P: Chris Waechter, ext. 108 (cwaechter@tmcnet.com)
Q-Z: Joe Fabiano, ext. 132 (jfabiano@tmcnet.com)

Editorial Offices are located at
One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A.

Customer Service: for all customer service matters,
call 203-852-6800.

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine has been the voice of the industry since 1982. It is written by industry practitioners for industry practitioners and is regarded worldwide as the "Bible" of the industry. An annual Buyer's Guide is provided as a feature of the December issue.

Copyright © 2007 Technology Marketing Corporation. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission of the publisher is prohibited.

Customer Inter@ction Solutions® and the TMC Logo are registered trademarks of Technology Marketing Corporation.

A Technology Marketing Publication

One Technology Plaza,
Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A.
Fax#: 203-853-2845
Sales Dept. Fax#: 203-838-4070

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

about self-regulation. ATA wants a more prominent seat at the big table where decisions about our industry are contemplated.

Are You Engaging In Self-regulation Just To Avoid New Regulation?

The ATA's interest is in a balanced, symbiotic relationship between businesses and consumers. Self-regulation creates an ideal means for businesses to properly address consumers' needs while still satisfying their own goals.

Regulators, specifically the FTC, support cooperative, self-regulatory efforts. However, in order for self-regulation to succeed and serve as the "I love you" echo from the canyon, it has to master the following criteria:

1. The Standards must be independent of any apparent bias overriding consumer interest.
2. The Standards must be strong and have teeth.
3. The Standards have to go above and beyond federal and state law. Why? The standards have to be preventative of increased regulation and should raise the bar for expected quality of service or sales delivery.

Our Self-Regulatory Standards represent the culmination of the collective efforts of a cross-section of ATA's membership (this group makes up the ATA-SRO, or "Self-Regulatory Organization") selected specifically for the purpose of generating an all-encompassing Standard for our industry. We are taking control of our industry — setting the bar higher to meet customer expectations and avoid future, harmful regulations.

The groundwork has been laid to accomplish all three criteria with our Contact Center Self-Regulatory Standards (www.bryancave/ata-sro). The ATA-SRO has released the Standards, and is currently developing a "seal" program to award and validate those companies that truly and passionately deliver on the customer's expectations by adhering to these Standards.

Why Will A SRO Work For Teleservices?

Think back to the boy at the canyon ridge. It's time to communicate and deliver what the consumer wants and needs in order to get what business wants in return. The consumer has spoken, and the decision-makers (on the consumer and corporate side) will demand it and regulators will accept it.

There is no simple solution. The success of self-regulation within other industries has been measured in years...sometimes in decades.

My point? Be positive, get excited and be conducive to growth for teleservices. Other industries succeeded when the professionals within their industry stood together, took back their industry, and delivered above and beyond the consumers' expectations. Better yet? The ATA has created an army within the ATA-SRO to help.

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

During my twenty years in the contact center and teleservices industry, I have learned two important lessons pertaining to client expectations. First and foremost, the client expects and deserves superior call quality and contact center performance on behalf of their customers. Secondly, the client deserves an honest, open and straightforward relationship with their vendor. In other words, a no-excuses environment.

I consider these two items to be the cornerstone of a strong client/vendor relationship. I am proud of the fact that our very experienced management staff shares and expresses this belief through their every-day client interactions. This fact is further substantiated by their ability to utilize their former client relationships as references.

At Thomas L. Cardella & Associates, you will find not only the latest state-of-the-art technology, but an experienced management team that understands the core fundamentals of building long-term business relationships.

We look forward to better understanding your business, and how we might be of assistance.

2007
President / CEO,
Thomas L. Cardella & Associates

2005-2007
Community / Charity /
Volunteer Efforts

2003-2005
Chairman / CEO,
Precision Response Corporation / PRC
(Retired)

2001-2003
President,
Hancock Information Group

1995-2003
President / Founder,
Access Direct

2004
Inducted into Customer Interaction
Solutions Hall of Fame

1996-2005
Ten consecutive Quality Awards
from Customer Interaction Solutions

Thomas L. Cardella & ASSOCIATES
Contact Center Specialists

www.tlcassociates.com | 888-788-0333

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

November 2007 Volume 26/ Number 6

Contents

DEPARTMENTS

1 Publisher's Outlook
By Nadji Tehrani, Executive Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.

6 Customer Inter@ction News™

6 CallCenterComics.com
By Ozzie Fonesca

10 Practical Pointers for Call Center Management
By Penny Reynolds, Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

32 Last Call
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

34 The Integrated Marketplace™

34 Identification Statement

34 Advertising Index

CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY

12 Turning Customers Into Their Own Call Center Agents
By Corey Freebairn, Microsoft

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM THE EXPERTS

14 A Heads-up On Selecting The Right Headset Solution
By Joe McGrogan, Plantronics, Inc.

15 Because No Two Call Centers Are Alike
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

MANAGEMENT SCOPE

16 Update On The Home Agent Model: Successful And Expanding
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

CASE STUDY

18 Improving Patient Care And Customer Service For The Healthcare Industry
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

20 Seeking Flexibility And Efficiency In The Insurance Industry
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

22 Raising The Bar On CRM Standards
By Natalie L. Petouhoff, Ph.D. and Brian R. Johnson, Hitachi Consulting

12
Turning Customers Into Their Own Call Center Agents

SPEECH TECHNOLOGY

28 Leveraging Speech Applications In The Contact Center, Part One
By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

ASK THE EXPERT

36 Ask The Expert: Integration For A Business Communications Solution
By Tim Passios, Director of Product Management, Interactive Intelligence

TMCNET.COM ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

TMCnet™

Research Shows Call Center Growth In India Not Detrimental To UK
By Susan J. Campbell, TMCnet Contributing Editor

When discussing the call center industry, it is not unusual to discuss the impact that the India contact center industry has had on the overall industry. Often, the discussion can turn negative considering the jobs that have been lost to individuals in India. For Britain, the common perception is that the country is losing jobs to India. Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1183.1

Go Green With The Help Of Home-Based Agents
By Christopher M. Carrington, CEO, Alpine Access

Just like many of you, I'm the head of a growing company. Every day, I make decisions that affect our bottom-line and understand the pressures all of us face to remain competitive in today's aggressive markets. Yet, recently there has been increasing importance put on corporate social responsibility, especially as concerns about climate change become more prominent. Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1184.1

CORRECTION:

In the September issue of Customer Interaction Solutions, in our IP Contact Center Roundup, Echopass (www.echopass.com) was inadvertently left off the list. Echopass is a provider of multi-tenant hosted call center solutions. We regret the omission.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

NICE SmartCenter™
for Contact Center and
Enterprise Performance.

Right-Time
Take timely action
to drive business
performance.

Insightful
Gain strategic
understanding of
customers and markets.

Proactive
Stay one step ahead
of the customer—
and the competition.

Turn your contact center into a high-performance business engine. With NICE SmartCenter.™

Could your contact center make the whole enterprise more responsive—and more competitive? It can. NICE SmartCenter delivers best-in-class quality and workforce management. Customer interaction capture and analytics. Coaching and more. And it's all unified within a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), to give you the insight to take right-time action. Add NICE's world-class business consulting, and you're not just on track, you're way ahead of the field.

NICE supports over 24,000 customers—including more than 85 of the Fortune 100—in over 100 countries.

Visit www.nice.com/nicesmartcenter

Insight from Interactions™

NICE®

Customer Inter@ction NEWS

By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

Interactive Intelligence Unveils New Release Of IP Communications And Contact Center Software

Interactive Intelligence (news - alert) recently announced a major upgrade to its enterprise VoIP and contact center automation software platforms. Customer Interaction Center 3.0 (CIC) and Vonexus Enterprise Interaction Center 3.0 (EIC) have been updated with new integration, deployment, security and mobility features. In terms of integration, the company has boosted CIC and EIC integration with Microsoft Office Communications Server and Microsoft Exchange 2007 Unified Messaging to help users be more productive by embedding call control features into those Microsoft applications. Mobile workers also gain integration with Microsoft Exchange calendar with Interactive Intelligence's Interaction Mobile Office application — plus cost-effective speech recognition capabilities and a graphical client interface that supports Windows Mobile 5.0 and 6.0. Finally, the latest release added new features making the software even easier to set up. Auto-provisioning is now included for Polycom phones, as is automated service updates and an enhanced version of the desktop client.

www.tmcnet.com/1279.1

Autonomy's etalk Recognized By Frost & Sullivan

Autonomy (news - alert) and its etalk solution (news - alert) have been recognized by Frost & Sullivan. Workforce optimization solution etalk is the recipient of the 2007 North American Frost & Sullivan Award for Product Innovation in the North American agent performance optimization (APO) market. Each year, Frost & Sullivan presents this award to the company that has demonstrated excellence in new products and technologies within its industry.

www.tmcnet.com/1280.1

Customer Service "View From The Top"

Customer satisfaction and loyalty consultants Omega Management Group, Inc. recently announced the View from Top (VFT) Research Panel 500 program. The new program — open only to VP-level executives in customer-facing positions — is devoted to the continuous improvement of the customer service industry. The VFT Research Panel 500 is now being formed as an online community. Charter membership is on an invitation-only basis, targeting VPs of customer service, support, sales/marketing and similar titles.

www.tmcnet.com/1270.1

Spanlink Communications Spins Off Calabrio Software

Seeking to focus purely on unified communications for the enterprise and SMB markets, Cisco partner Spanlink Communications (news - alert) is spinning off its Calabrio Software division, which has a focus on workforce optimization software for the contact center. As of November 2007, Calabrio will operate as a separate, independent company focused on the development and distribution of customer interaction and workforce optimization software for IP-based contact centers.

www.tmcnet.com/1271.1

Aspect And OpenSpan Partner For Integration

Aspect Software, Inc. (news - alert) and OpenSpan, an application integration company, have announced the general availability of the OpenSpan integration with Aspect's PerformanceEdge quality management application. The integration with OpenSpan allows Aspect Software to extend Aspect quality management functionality, such as screen capture and call tagging, to record all back-office interactions with applications across the enterprise, helping companies gain insight into overall agent performance and create actionable plans to enhance productivity, performance and the customer experience.

www.tmcnet.com/1272.1

InfoCision's Steve Brubaker Honored By ATA

Steve Brubaker, senior vice president of corporate affairs for InfoCision Management Corp., (news - alert) has been awarded the highest honor in the teleservices industry. Steve was presented with the 2007 Fulcrum Award, presented by the American Teleservices Association (ATA) at its National Convention held in October in Scottsdale, Arizona. In addition, Brubaker was named to the organization's National Board of Directors.

www.tmcnet.com/1274.1

Greg Gianforte, CEO Of RightNow Technologies, Inducted Into CRM Hall Of Fame

RightNow Technologies' (news - alert) CEO, Greg Gianforte, was recently inducted into the CRM Hall of Fame. Named "The Lone Wolf," the tribute noted that Gianforte has spent the last decade "in Bozeman, Montana, far from the glare of Silicon Valley and the rest of the CRM cohort." Gianforte founded RightNow in 1997 in Bozeman with a goal of creating a world-class enterprise software company in Montana, and within three years

CallCenterComics.com
OUR CEO WANTS US TO CONDENSE OUR 6 WEEK NEW HIRE TRAINING INTO A MORE COST EFFECTIVE CYCLE. HOW SHORT CAN YOU MAKE IT?
IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT, BUT I MAY BE ABLE TO SHRINK THE TRAINING DOWN TO 5 WEEKS.
©2006 By CallCenterComics.com
I ALREADY COMMITTED TO DOING IT IN 2 DAYS. WHAT WILL THE REPS LEARN IN THAT TIME?
TO HATE OUR COMPANY
By Ozzie Fonesca

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

"Packet8 hosted iPBX phone service with powerful call center functionality lets us focus on our customers rather than our phones."

Packet8® Virtual Office Complete Contact Center

Introducing Virtual Office Complete Contact Center from Packet8—a fully integrated, hosted iPBX call center solution that uses your existing network to enable high quality digital calling services along with a complete, turnkey call center solution—all from a single service provider.

- **Powerful** – Skill-based routing and Advanced ACD queuing across multiple media—Phone, Email, Chat, CRM, Fax and more
- **Flexible** – Unify on-site and remote agents under one phone system; add extensions as needed
- **Affordable** – Hosted solution means there is no expensive hardware or software to install or maintain
- **Manageable** – Real-time reporting and managing of contact details through online tools
- **Complete** – Includes dial tone, PBX features, contact center functionality and affordable business calling plans

Learn how Packet8 is making traditional call center technology a thing of the past.
Ask about our special offer for CIS magazine readers. Offer expires December 7, 2007.

© 2007 8x8, Inc.

Powered by Contactual

www.Packet8.net | 1.866.675.3728

By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

Gianforte had 500 customers, 100 employees and an on-demand product that could "dramatically improve the quality and effectiveness of clients' online customer service operations," according to the Hall of Fame citation.
www.tmcnet.com/1277.1

Research Shows Contact Center Service Impacts Business

According to the Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index Europe 2007 study, produced by both Aspect (news - alert) and Leo J. Shapiro and Associates, 33 percent of European consumers who were satisfied with their last interaction would conduct more business with that company. A total of eight percent of those customers would do much more business with that company. Conversely, nearly half of customers who were unsatisfied claimed they would conduct less business.
www.tmcnet.com/1281.1

NICE Recognized By Gartner And Frost & Sullivan

NICE Systems (news - alert) has announced that it is the recipient of the prestigious 2007 Market Leadership Award for Excellence in North American contact center quality management solutions from Frost & Sullivan. The analyst firm cited NICE as number one in its industry report. Additionally, research and analysis company Gartner has also rated the company "strong positive" — its highest rating possible — in two recent reports, "MarketScope for Contact Center Quality Management" and "MarketScope for Contact Center Workforce Management."
www.tmcnet.com/1282.1

Plantronics' New Wideband USB Optimized For MS Office Communicator 2007

Plantronics (news - alert) has announced that its new SupraPlus Wideband USB professional headset is optimized for Microsoft Office Communicator 2007. The headset provides Office Communicator 2007 users with enhanced wideband audio, reliability and hands-free communications. Utilizing more than twice the audio bandwidth of conventional telephony, Wideband greatly enhances intelligibility.
www.tmcnet.com/1283.1

SAP And Business Objects Join In Friendly Merger

SAP and Business Objects, two leaders in the information technology industry, recently announced they are joining forces. The Business Objects board of directors has approved the agreement and plans to recommend the offer to its shareholders. The friendly merger is expected to result in greater efficiency for business users. Both companies plan on offering high-value solutions for business- and process-oriented professionals, designed for helping companies looking to increase customer value, strengthen decision processes and create more sustainable competitive advantage.

www.tmcnet.com/1284.1

SAS Placed In Visionaries Quadrant For Data Integration Tools Magic Quadrant

SAS, (news - alert) a provider of business intelligence, has been placed by Gartner, Inc. in the Visionaries Quadrant of the "Magic Quadrant for Data Integration Tools, 2007" report. SAS supplies data integration, helping customers through a full range of solutions that include connectivity and metadata; data cleansing and enrichment; extraction, transformation and loading (ETL); migration and synchronization; data federation; and master data management.
www.tmcnet.com/1285.1

Cbeyond And Avaya Team For SIP Trunking Services

Cbeyond (news - alert) recently announced that its BeyondVoice with SIPconnect service, an integrated package of local and long-distance voice, broadband Internet and mobile services, is interoperable with Avaya's (news - alert) IP Office solution, a converged voice and data system. Together, the companies said they provide small businesses with business-quality voice services, increased flexibility and reduced costs. "Through our joint commitment to interoperability, Cbeyond and Avaya are able to deliver a comprehensive communications solution for small businesses," said Chris Gatch, CTO for Cbeyond.
www.tmcnet.com/1286.1

Verint Named To Annual Software 500

Contact center solutions provider Verint Systems Inc. (news - alert) has announced that it has been named to Software Magazine's Annual Software 500. Now in its 25th year, the program ranks the world's largest software and service providers. Verint, included in the Software 500 for the first time, was ranked 98th. In addition to contact center quality solutions, Verint offers networked video solutions, communications interception and analytics solutions to government and law enforcement entities and enterprise performance software.
www.tmcnet.com/1288.1

Aspect Enhances eWorkforce Management

The PerformanceEdge Group of Aspect Software (news - alert) has announced new and enhanced workforce management functionality for PerformanceEdge. Aspect eWorkforce Management 7.1 now provides contact centers with expanded agent scheduling capabilities to better comply with local, regional and country labor laws. Additionally, the Aspect eWorkforce Management – Analyze II enhancement package now includes pre-packaged performance management features focused on workforce management, automatic call distributor (ACD) and dialer applications. The PerformanceEdge solution combines workforce management, recording and quality management, performance management, campaign management, and coaching and e-learning to enable organizations to more holistically respond to changing business conditions.
www.tmcnet.com/1290.1

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

On the Verge of Greatness?

Finally, a tool to give you a competitive edge.

ucn
get inContact®

The best contact centers have found ways to improve customer satisfaction while lowering costs. Introducing the new breed of contact center applications - available on demand. It's live. Just log in to get it all! Can your contact center stack up to what your best competitors are doing? Ask yourself, can you...

- Determine optimal staffing levels for any given shift on any given day?
- Intelligently and economically route calls anywhere in the world? What about monitoring?
- Train agents at their desktops during downtimes?
- Share direct customer feedback to motivate agents?
- Effectively filter applicants and hire the right personnel?
- Pinpoint key attributes of your best agents and replicate those skills center-wide?

InContact® is a fully-fuctional contact center platform capable of serving enterprise-grade centers eliminating the need to manage connectivity or software infrastructure while yielding remarkable TCO advantages over premises-based alternatives. Integrated ACD and workforce management components deliver the right agent at the right time. Hiring, eLearning and communication modules when combined with the ACD result in more skillful and motivated agents speaking the right message at the right time.

UCN's inContact will change your world with implementation measured in days, not months allowing you to innovate and focus efforts on your critical business needs.

Greatness is just a click or call away!
www.ucn.net/incontact or 866.519.7867.

ucn™ get inContact®

By Penny Reynolds

Contributing Editor, Customer Inter@ction Solutions

A Practical Guide To Seasonal Call Center Staffing

As we enter the holiday season, many centers are faced with the same problem: how to effectively hire and train employees for what may be a very short length of hire. There are five basic options available to address the challenges of seasonal staffing requirements.

Option 1: Returning Staff

The ideal solution to the seasonal staffing dilemma is to find people willing to work only the few months of the year you need them, and use them year after year. They will likely not need a full training period. After a refresher, they can hit the ground running. Nice solution if you can get them, right?

One mistake that many call centers make is to assume that because your base workforce is made up of full-time staff, your seasonal workers should work a 40-hour week too. To attract more seasonal staff, you will likely need to hire mostly part-timers to fit the requirements of this different labor force. There are many people who may be looking for a little extra income at this time of year and who would appreciate the opportunity to work three or four hours a day.

Many call centers attribute their success at covering seasonal demand to not only hiring part-time staff, but hiring people who fit the ideal part-time profile. Some people will be willing to work part-time during the holiday season as a second job. However, sometimes there's not enough energy left after the first job to devote to the catalog center position. Others may take a part-time position as a way to get a foot in the door with the company. These people will never be happy with a part-time position and are certainly not likely to return the following year if they've been laid off after the peak season ends.

The part-time position needs to be well-defined with both expectation of working hours as well as the duration of the job. Those who take the position with full knowledge of schedule definitions as well as length of employment will likely be the ones that return the following year.

To find these ideal part-timers, cast a large net and recruit in such a way that you're reaching an optimal audience of candidates. Newspaper classified ads will likely not be sufficient. Use your existing workforce for job referrals and reward them for bringing in qualified candidates. Expand the search to billboards and other advertising media to ensure you're getting in front of as many potential candidates as possible.

Option 2: Shared Staff

Some centers with a busy seasonal holiday pattern look to local businesses that may slow down in the fall. Some recruit workers directly with great success from businesses that have a summer peak. You can try to reach these potential staff with wide and well-timed advertising, or you can elect to go to the source and work with those businesses directly.

For example, a center with a holiday peak from October to January might work with building supply stores. With shoppers reducing building supply and gardening needs in the fall and winter, not as many staff are needed in these stores. A call center might work with these companies to advertise open positions from October through January. The call center benefits by having a ready supply of candidates with great customer service training, and the stores benefit by having a way to ensure employment for all its workers during the slower months.

Arrangements like this require creativity in the planning, processes and compensation arrangements. You'll want to ask what types of businesses or call centers have a peak time opposite to that of your business.

Option 3: Local Staffing Agencies

Some centers work through local staffing agencies to find temporary full-time or part-time staff. This "in-sourcing" involves the use of a staffing agency to recruit, screen and hire temporary workers. These staff are typically treated as employees of the temporary agency, but in some instances the call center may actually hire the employees.

In most cases, the training and supervision of the staff is handled by call center personnel, but in some instances, the agency actually expands their role into training and supervision of their temporary staff. The contract staffing agency may perform the recruiting, hiring and training activities at their site, or when there is a large staffing demand, may have dedicated agency staff actually reside at the call center site.

The call center typically pays more for a contract staffing person, since the staffing rate includes an "overhead" charge for the staffing agency, but the added cost is offset by the staffing expertise, flexibility of dictating schedule demands and a trial working arrangement.

Many contract agencies have a contract with the call center where the center can hire temporary staff to be permanent com-

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

pany employees. This arrangement lets the call center "try before they buy" in terms of adding permanent staff to the payroll. If there is a problem with any contract employee, the call center simply has to inform the agency and does not have to go through disciplinary and severance procedures that are likely required with company employees.

One of the advantages of contract staffing is also one of the major disadvantages. Since the agents work for the staffing agency and not the company, the call center has less control over them than if they were company employees. And since most of the positions are temporary, the staff may decide to leave if they find permanent positions elsewhere, making staff turnover a bigger problem.

Option 4: Non-Traditional Staffing Agencies

Another contract staffing possibility is to evaluate the use of staffing agencies that may not be in your local area, but can supply staff on an as-needed basis. Companies like Willow CSN or Alpine Access have a network of agents in a wide geographic area that primarily work from home. These agents are independent contractors with the agency serving as a broker for their services. These agents are trained in the area of customer service and handle a wide variety of sales and service calls. They can generally be trained quickly and can be available for whatever length of service your company requires.

Option 5: Call Center Outsourcers

A final option is to contract with another company to handle some or all of your call demand. The main reason that businesses outsource call center functions is to avoid the resource drain and costs associated with initial set-up and ongoing operation of a function that is typically not the core competency of the business.

Outsourcing need not be an all or nothing solution. A business such as a catalog can still maintain call-handling operations, but simply choose to send overflow calls or seasonal demand calls to an outsourcing partner as a supplement to internal operations.

The high level of competition among outsourcers results in high levels of performance. Outsourcers can be held to higher levels of performance than internal call centers, since the customer can simply take away business if performance standards are not met. Internal call centers may take longer to respond to customer demands and there is typically not as much of a significant consequence if performance levels are not met.

Getting the "just right" number of staff in place to answer the calls is one of the biggest challenges for a call center no matter what the time of year. Adding a peak, short-term demand makes this task all the more challenging. The key to successful seasonal staffing is a good forecast to accurately predict incoming call center demand for the coming period. You'll then want to weigh all the options carefully to ensure you fill those seats in the most effective way possible to take maximum advantage of those seasonal orders.

Penny Reynolds is a Founding Partner of The Call Center School, a Nashville, Tennessee-based consulting and education company. She is the author of several call center management books, including Call Center Staffing — The Complete, Practical Guide to Workforce Management. Contact her at penny.reynolds@thecallcenterschool.com or call 615-812-8410.

By Corey Freebairn, Microsoft

Turning Customers Into Their Own Call Center Agents

Ideally, call centers would be available to offer round-the-clock support and provide superior assistance to meet every customer's unique needs. Doing so, however, can exhaust both human and technical resources. Some companies are turning this challenge into an opportunity, finding a solution in an unlikely place.

Call Center In Crisis

Industries that rely on call centers for support and sales often face a conflagration of human resource and IT challenges that leave them wishing for an emergency helpline for call centers. Let's take a look at a theoretical print media company as an example — a company that offers subscription-based magazines and newspapers to its customers. The company's customer care staff answers calls for paper deliveries and subscription renewals. It also recently began managing the advertising specials in daily papers and the weekly magazines. This is an excellent extension of the media company's business, but it presented new challenges. Rapid growth from on-sale items and specials caused a need for additional applications to support these new features. The customer service representatives (CSRs) had to be trained on each application. The reality for the CSRs, however, was redundant data entry combined with the hassle of accessing each application separately.

Now, customers can edit their address information and name spellings, and update their e-mail and cell phone numbers, and the database has never been more current.

Eventually, someone at the company wondered, "Is there a way to provide access to all those systems (line-of-business applications) into one sign-on and one computer screen?" The answer was "yes," and the company spent significant resources to achieve the result. The improvement was obvious: The same CSRs required less training, the turnover rates lowered and both CSR performance and customer satisfaction began tracking significantly higher.

So, the initial fire was brought under control, but a new question fanned the flames: "How can we add more service or sales opportunities without overburdening our CSR staff?" The answer might surprise you: Turn customers into volunteer CSRs.

Customers As Volunteer CSRs

In today's 24x7x365 world, customers want to get information or solve problems on their own terms, not those predefined by a company. Aggregating customer information across all the ways customers interact with your company makes it possible for busy customers to use self-service channels to quickly and easily address their concerns. This experience gives them control over their interactions and makes customers feel that your company respects the value of their time as well as the value of their business.

The print media company we discussed previously took the same technology that connected disparate systems to the single sign-on and unified agent desktop, and turned it around to face the customer via a Web portal. The company judiciously decided on all the parts of the company's line-of-business applications that it wanted to expose to its customers.

Now, customers can edit their address information and name spellings, and update their e-mail and cell phone numbers, and the database has never been more current. Even better, customer satisfaction is up. As an added bonus, many of those items sold in the publications can be purchased quickly and easily over the Web without agent intervention.

Intensive Self-Care

Although self-service isn't for every customer, this sort of account portal is becoming more popular, with basic functionality often including access to a user's account status, payment history, service descriptions, related knowledge bases or FAQs and similar items.

The next level might include asking the self-service customer, "How do you want us (the business) to interact with you (the customer)?" For instance, a credit card company might offer reminder e-mails about the customer's account or an option for electronic payment. Portals can offer opt-in or opt-out for advertising e-mails and offers, paper statements or electronic statements, and access to other accounts. All this service and opportunity arises simply because someone decided to turn the screen around and give the customers direct access.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

One other area worth mentioning in this resume of forward-looking implementations in customer service is the automated service agent (ASA). This is a "chat-like" technology popping up on many self-service portals and has tremendous benefits for call deflection, transfer to live agents with session history, and even decision-tree implementation to customers (or even the agents). By design, an ASA can address the top self-help-related issues in "natural language." For instance, a customer could go to the Web portal for a large cable company and type in "what channels are in my area?" The ASA asks for the customer's ZIP code and then promptly displays the channel lineup for that area.

> **some companies today are turning this challenge into opportunity by offering Web-savvy, time-restricted customers quick answers to their everyday questions.**

Final Prescription

To ensure exceptional customer service, call centers must be available to offer round-the-clock support and provide superior assistance to meet every customer's unique needs. Meeting these demands can exhaust both human and technical resources, but some companies today are turning this challenge into opportunity by offering Web-savvy, time-restricted customers quick answers to their everyday questions. It all starts when companies invite their customers to be their own service representatives.

Corey Freebairn is a Senior Product Manager at Microsoft (quote - news - alert) (www.microsoft.com). Corey has spent over 22 years in software and telecommunications. His experience has included pioneering in groupware, fax servers, computer-telephony integration (CTI), unified messaging, IP telephony and contact centers for both the enterprise and service providers. His current focus is Microsoft's customer care initiatives including Customer Care Framework Solutions.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Innovative Solutions From The Headset Experts

A Special Editorial Series Sponsored By Plantronics, Inc.

A Heads-up On Selecting The Right Headset Solution:

By Joe McGrogan, Plantronics, Inc.

How To Choose Between Direct Connect And Amplified Headset Solutions

It's hard to imagine walking into a contact center and not seeing employees wearing headsets. But while most headsets look pretty much the same on the ear, there's a big difference at the end of the cord. When it comes to connecting to a phone or ACD terminal, users have two fundamental choices: a direct connect headset or a headset with the addition of an amplifier. For contact center operators, the choice between the two can make a big difference in productivity and return on investment, and making the right decision requires balancing cost and capabilities.

Direct connect headsets plug directly into the headset port of the phone equipment. Users adjust the headset volume using the volume control on the telephone equipment itself. Alternatively, you can attach a headset to an amplifier, which in turn connects to the telephone equipment and ensures compatibility. While some phones — especially newer IP phones — provide a headset port that allows users to directly plug in a headset, many telephones do not, and consequently require an amplifier.

Amplifiers

Buyers are often confused by the term "amplifier" because much like in the consumer audio arena where today's so-called amplifiers pack the power of entire home theater systems, Plantronics amplifiers offer many capabilities beyond simply providing volume control and a means to physically attach a headset to a telephone.

Plantronics amplifiers, like the Plantronics Vista M22, improve operator productivity and customer satisfaction by incorporating a number of features that enhance sound quality. For example, advanced audio control helps to minimize operator fatigue, which can prove critical to customer satisfaction by allowing operators to respond to customers more efficiently without annoying repetitions and with fewer errors while inputting data. Automatic volume control allows users to select their preferred listening level. A call volume equalizer then adjusts the level of the incoming signal so that no matter the volume of the incoming call (cell phone, poor line, great line), the received audio is always at the same preferred level. Advanced echo management also delivers quality audio on all calls — even when delays in the line would otherwise result in echo on the call, which is especially true on IP connections. This is important since phones are designed to provide echo management with a handset, and not necessarily with a headset.

As more and more phone makers incorporate headset ports into their equipment, buyers often incorrectly assume that many important headset features are also built in. But, for example, these simple direct connect ports typically provide only rudimentary volume control.

Another common misconception is that because many new IP phones have direct connect headset ports, amplifiers are not needed. In fact, amplifiers are recommended even more for IP because of latency and echo issues asso-

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

ciated with IP voice communication. IP desk phones are not immune from echo even if they have echo mitigation, since any mitigation they provide is for the handset.

Direct Connect

Compared with a headset and amplifier used in combination, direct connect headsets are less expensive and have a smaller footprint.

Another common misconception is that because many new IP phones have direct connect headset ports, amplifiers are not needed. In fact, amplifiers are recommended even more for IP because of latency and echo issues associated with IP voice communication.

Plantronics direct connect headsets offer extremely clear sound quality and superior reliability that comes from our long heritage of working with leading telecom providers to create breakthroughs in everything from wireless and IP technologies to our own patented sound innovations. In fact, Plantronics is the only headset provider offering Avaya-branded direct connect solutions, and when Cisco wanted to provide a direct connect headset port, Cisco contacted Plantronics to collaborate on the design.

While direct connect headsets don't offer the sophisticated volume control of amplifier-based systems, Plantronics direct connect headsets have the highest level of acoustic protection built in to assure optimal safety and comfort.

Both Plantronics direct connect headsets and Plantronics amplified solutions are excellent choices. However, in contact centers where improving productivity, reducing operator fatigue, and improving customer satisfaction are top concerns, the benefits of an amplifier-based solution far outweigh the slight incremental difference in costs.

Joe McGrogan is Director of Marketing, B2B Solutions, for Plantronics, Inc. (news - alert) (www.plantronics.com).

Because No Two Call Centers Are Alike

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

Nor, for that matter, are any two agents alike.

I often get e-mail from individuals starting up call centers asking me what the "best" equipment is. My answer is always the same: "That depends." Call centers are not stamped out from cookie cutters. They have different clients. Different customer demographics. Different demands for their call center agents. Different demands on their equipment. What's important is understanding your call center's requirements first, before you go shopping for equipment.

Are your call center's customers primarily calling from home, from work, or on mobile phones? Is more of your traffic carried via by VoIP than PSTN? What is the complexity of your average transaction? How long are your agents typically on the phone per transaction? How much data entry to agents need to do for a typical transaction? How many agents do you have? Do agents share workstations? Is keeping agent turnover low important to you? How much would shaving just five seconds off each call impact your bottom line?

A decision like whether to direct-connect your agents' headsets or use amplifiers is a great example of this need to know your call center and weigh its needs. Too often, the decisions regarding what equipment to buy for the call center are left in the hands of individuals who don't understand that in a high work volume environment like a call center, a decision that is perceived to save a little money will in the long run cost the company a great deal of money.

Imagine a large-volume call center that takes calls from customers of a wireless Internet service. Each customer has a 20-digit account number. Because of the nature of the business (wireless Internet service), the customers are very mobile. Most call from the road on their cell phones. Now imagine that the less-than-optimal sound quality provided by the agents' headsets, combined with the fact that most customers are calling on mobiles, requires that a third of the customers need to repeat their customer numbers at least once. What does that add onto one-third of the call center's calls? Ten seconds? Fifteen? Multiply that time by several million calls, and the extra agent time, the increased margin for error and the extra toll-free time the company is paying for, not to mention agent and customer frustration, all combine to become a hidden drag on business.

So can the wrong headset solution sink your business? OK…maybe not. But it can certainly mean the difference between succeeding and merely existing.

The author may be reached at tschelmetic@tmcnet.com

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

Update On The Home Agent Model: Successful And Expanding

The home-agent model for call centers has been attracting a great deal of attention as of late. Often, new trends such as these are more hype than reality: once the mainstream news media pick up such stories (and they have been picking up the home agent story), it often means that the concept is more flash than reality.

This is not the case with the home agent model, however. Increasingly, companies are expanding their hiring of home agents. As success stories spread throughout the call center industry and the business world at large, combined with the negative press being garnered by offshore outsourcing, more companies are beginning to perk up at the mention of home agents, recognizing it as a viable option to shipping jobs offshore and taking a crapshoot with quality.

Perhaps one of the reasons the work-at-home model is succeeding so well is that it offers benefits to both employer and employee and, done properly, presents no downside. In an era of increasing traffic and awareness of the contributions of auto emissions to bad air quality, the home agent model is quite "green." It also contributes to better productivity, as workers are not wasting up to an hour (or more) per day on a commute. The time saved can be saved for family, or extra work hours. Because it requires no expansion of physical facilities, it keeps capital expenditures down. It also tends to attract a more mature, more stable and better educated caliber of agent.

The newest player to the home agent model is Akron, Ohio-based InfoCision Management Corp., which has been around for two decades and has been named among the top 10 best places to work in Ohio by the state Chamber of Commerce. The company has about 150 people currently on staff at home, and it's looking to expand that number.

Stratasoft
A TRG Company
StrataServer
SIMPLY THE BEST

Enterprise Class – Inbound/Outbound Call Center Applications

services:
hosted contact center
VoIP agents
SIP soft phone
IVR
dynamic messaging
managed services

functions:
in-bound/skills based ACD
predictive/preview/progressive
home based agents
call blending
quality monitoring/recording
on-the-fly script changes

www.stratasoft.com • 800.390.1157
excellence through passion // excellent customer service

Stratasoft
A TRG Company

InfoCision (news - alert) is having no problems recruiting highly qualified home agents. The company works closely with state and local agencies to identify qualified candidates for the work-at-home program. Its recruitment literature informs potential workers that, "If you have mobility issues that make it difficult for you to work outside the home or are a stay-at-home parent, or if you simply want to work from home, InfoCision's work-at-home program is what you've been looking for. No telemarketing experience is necessary — we provide extensive training and coaching via the Internet."

As for how InfoCision's home agent program stands out against others, Senior VP of Corporate Affairs Steve Brubaker said it's in the way the company treats its home employees. "The difference in our model is that our work at home employees have the same pay, benefits and status as those employees who work for us in our bricks and mortar locations," said Brubaker. "We do not use the approach of independent contractors as many others in the industry."

Indeed, InfoCision's home agents receive full company benefits. Requirements to be a home agent include only high-speed Internet access, a decent computer, up-to-date Windows and Internet Explorer and anti-virus and anti-spyware software.

Given the positive testimonials from both clients of outsourced home agent programs and the home agents themselves, it's hard not be positive about the trend. And as home agent programs expand further, perhaps a few commuters still stuck on the highway will begin to notice a little more breathing room.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

HANDLE IT ALL WITHOUT MISSING A CALL

GO WIRELESS AND
GO WHERE YOU'RE NEEDED

Everything changes when your headset goes wherever your feet take you. So free yourself with the SupraPlus® Wireless, and start handling escalations and speeding resolutions without missing your own important calls.

Learn more at www.plantronics.com/contactcenter
or call 1-800-682-0370

SupraPlus® Wireless
- Range up to 300 feet
- Specfically designed for the contact center
- Available in Binaural & Monaural models

PRODUCT
CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions
2006
OF THE YEAR

PLANTRONICS
SOUND INNOVATION™

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

Improving Patient Care And Customer Service For the Healthcare Industry

Who: Valley Radiologists, a large, full-service medical imaging center in Arizona. It has 10 locations and 45 radiologists, performs about 250,000 studies annually and plans to add locations and grow each year.

Before: The multiple locations were supported by a single call center. In 2004, its network infrastructure and telephone system were a mismatched amalgamation of several vendor products without consistent support, backup or easy internal communications. The radiologists did not have access to the most-up-to-date imaging technology, which compromised their ability to consult efficiently with referring physicians and left open the possibility that a referring physician could send cases to other radiology practices, resulting in lost revenue. As a result, prospective patients calling into the call center were sometimes dropped, and hold times could extend to beyond 10 minutes. More importantly, patient care was sometimes offered at below optimal levels because radiologists did not have the means to easily access images, and often had to travel to multiple locations to review cases.

"Radiologists provide an important service to the medical community," said Cisco Senior Medical Informatics Director Dr. Danny Sands, M.D. "Radiology practices must, therefore, provide superior customer service to referring physicians and streamline the efficiency of their operations to maintain viability. That is why it is imperative that radiology practices have access to solutions like Connected Imaging, which eliminates reliance on expensive and outdated resources like film, and makes it easier to collaborate with referring physicians and improve both customer service and patient care."

Valley Radiologists was also saddled with recurring maintenance and service contracts that cost them more than $150,000 per year due to the multiple vendors and the patched together nature of the telecommunications and network systems.

The Solution

Valley Radiologists realized that they needed a clinically based solution built on a solid and reliable infrastructure. For this they chose the Cisco Connected Imaging solution built on its safe and secure Medical-Grade Network. Connected Imaging delivers imaging as a service from the Medical-Grade Network using Cisco Unified Communications and advanced data center technologies.

Cisco Connected Imaging aligned with Philips iSite Picture Archive & Communication System (PACS) on the Valley Radiologists imaging solution. Together, Cisco and Philips helped Valley Radiologists eliminate film and render patient or physician geography a non-issue. This became the path to providing superior patient care while protecting privacy.

The Cisco Connected Imaging solution helps radiologists interpret image study and collaborate with referring physicians in real-time, facilitating rapid diagnosis and treatment of patients. It accelerated the elimination of the costs and delays associated with traditional film imaging.

"Valley Radiologists wanted to manage costs by improving patient workflow and staff overhead," says Todd Wingler, the Cisco Account Manager. "For Phase One, Valley built a data center that also housed a call center with 25 agents to centralize patient scheduling and workflow. For Phase 2, Valley purchased a Cisco Unified Communications and Connected Imaging solution. By connecting the imaging systems at the different sites, radiologists at multiple sites are able to balance their workload and collaborate more effectively."

The Results: Cisco worked with its partner, local telecommunications vendor Qwest, on the Valley Radiologists core network as the company invested in a medical-grade network infrastructure upgrade that included new routers and new switches. "This phase helped us move three terabytes of data in May 2007 compared to traffic that measured in the hundreds of megabytes before the upgrade," Bennett says. "Our efficiency has increased by a factor of 10, and Cisco, Philips and Qwest were able to deliver an overall solution that has 99.99 percent uptime."

The new solution utilizing Cisco Contact Center Express helped improve customer service and led to greater job satisfaction with Valley Radiologists' staff. Efficiency has been increased, morale has improved and hold times have dropped from as high as seven minutes to nearly zero.

Precise measurement of patients lost due to outmoded equipment or lengthy waits in the call center are difficult, since many of those were never introduced in the practice. However, the measurable gains are impressive: Valley Radiologists was able to eliminate about $150,000 per year in recurring maintenance and service contract expenses and $60,000 annually in telephone-system related expense. According to Bennett, another major savings was that the new system "stopped the losses in terms of immeasurable business lost through dropped calls and some consultations that may not have occurred." New infrastructure and communications solutions paid for themselves within 14 months with just the measurable savings.

The deployment of the integrated Cisco solution has provided a mechanism through which Valley Radiologists has also been able to reassign at least three full-time equivalent positions as a result of increased clinical connectivity and reengineered workflow. "Our decision to deploy a Unified Communications solution practice-wide continues to provide value in our company's ability to rapidly deploy applications and tune image and information workflow to meet the needs of the business," Bennett says.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

SENNHEISER
COMMUNICATIONS

Adaptive

You need a wireless headset that works with you, not against you. The Sennheiser BW900 features Adaptive Intelligence for automatic, real-time audio adjustments that optimize call quality according to your personal preferences. The BW900 is ready for the dynamics of your contact center with seamless toggling between Bluetooth enabled mobile devices and your desktop phone and a range up to 300 ft.

www.sennheiserusa.com/adapt

Sennheiser Electronic Corp • Tel 860-434-9190 · www.sennheiserusa.com • Latin America: Tel 52-55-5638-1020 • Canada: Tel 514-426-3013 · www.sennheiser.ca

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

Seeking Flexibility And Efficiency In The Insurance Industry

Who: With the concept of promoting public education, Kyobo Life Insurance was established in 1958, creating the first education insurance in the world. More recently, Kyobo Life has focused on quality management to maximize business value based on quality growth through customer services

Before: Since opening its first call center in 1998, the Kyobo Life Insurance Company felt the need for a more flexible solution; one that was capable of integrating diverse communication channels, including telephone, e-mail and fax, while effectively responding to the changing needs of customers. Company CEO, Shin Chang-jae, concluded that an IP-based contact center solution would provide the required scalability along with centralized management of distributed call centers across the country.

The Solution: When Kyobo Life was looking to centralize call center activities, it decided to use an IP-based contact center to consolidate five existing call centers into two call centers. Following a thorough benchmark test, Kyobo Life selected Avaya IP Contact Center. With an IP contact center, Kyobo Live would also be able to provide higher quality services to customers without disrupting current capabilities. With the first phase of construction completed, one existing center was rebuilt as a 427-seat, hybrid IP contact center, while the new center was a complete 250-seat, IP-based contact center. Kyobo Life also designed both centers to serve as redundant contact centers, where one will act as the back-up in case of system failure at the other, guaranteeing business continuity.

The Results: By integrating intranet, Internet and voice channels, and enhancing service speed through IP mapping, Kyobo Life expects its new IP contact center to generate considerable revenue. As Soon-ho Choi, System 1 Team Manager for Kyobo Life observed, "We are estimating that more than $9 million of net income will be generated over the next five years with the new IP contact center." He added, "However, that figure only covers income resulting from inbound calls. The amounts would be higher if we considered the potential income from outbound calls as well." Kyobo Life has additional plans for ongoing IP contact center growth such as integrating its existing contact centers and creating a consolidated 700-seat contact center. And into the future, the company anticipates further expansion to increase that contact center to 1,000 seats, which would make it the largest in Korea.

As Soon-ho Choi, System 1 Team Manager for Kyobo Life observed, "We are estimating that more than $9 million of net income will be generated over the next five years with the new IP contact center."

"We chose Avaya because we have trust in Avaya, which has the most abundant experience and know-how in the Korean call center market," said Choi. "Moreover, the Avaya solution was found to be superior to other competing solutions, as no call is abandoned during call congestion. This provides operational reliability with a redundant structure that enables instant back-up in case of server failure as well as best service routing (BSR) for a multisite contact center and various call center applications. He continued, "Another reason behind our decision to choose the Avaya solution was that we can move to an IP contact center while protecting our investment in the existing facilities," said Choi. "Since it has just been built, it is hard to determine, at this point, the exact effects of an IP contact center. We recognize that equipping a center with the most advanced devices or facilities alone cannot be the answer. What is more important is the effort to use the infrastructure more flexibly and more efficiently." He emphasized, "At Kyobo, we aim to continue developing our Avaya IP Contact Center solution to enhance our TCO and ROI, thereby driving customer satisfaction and generating added profits."

Kyobo's efforts are not going unnoticed. "People are paying keen attention to the results of the Kyobo IP contact center project since there have not been many cases of IP contact center implementation in Korea," noted Choi. "We are expecting that this project will be regarded as a successful introduction of an IP contact center."

One of the most important factors contributing to Kyobo Life's satisfaction was Avaya's end-to-end competency, which enabled successful first-phase completion of the IP contact center project without causing any disruptions. Kyobo Life was also impressed by the support it received from Locus, a local Avaya BusinessPartner.

"We are satisfied with the performance of Avaya and Locus. They were able to successfully complete the first phase of the project despite the tight schedule," said Choi. "Even though it is never an easy task, they also successfully integrated some unique applications for a life insurance company as well as multichannel applications." He added, "And considering the solution's excellent scalability, the Avaya IP solution will certainly help Kyobo to accomplish its ultimate goal of building an all IP contact center."

Autonomy etalk

Are your customers giving you gifts you just can't open?

Autonomy etalk surpasses traditional approaches to call center automation by understanding the meaning hidden inside customer conversations and emails. Our Intelligent Contact Center solutions automate the capturing, analysis and sharing of valuable customer information. An industry leader with a $2.5 billion market cap, Autonomy might just be your biggest surprise.

With Autonomy **etalk** you'll be able to appreciate their pearls of wisdom.

Find out how Autonomy etalk can help you find your jewels of information by visiting us at www.etalk.com or call us at 800.835.6357

By Natalie L. Petouhoff, Ph.D. and Brian R. Johnson, Hitachi Consulting

Raising The Bar On CRM Standards:

Driving Toward A Customer-Centric Call Center And CRM Financial Strategy

You've been on hold for 20 minutes. It's not the first time you've called this company's contact center. You've keyed in your account number via a maze of IVR menus, none of which sounded like what you needed. You tried to use the speech recognition feature, but it did not recognize anything you said. Frustrated, you hit "0" for an agent. The recording alerts you to long wait times. You finally get an agent and they ask you for your account number. You wonder why, since you just punched it into the key pad. You've called six times before, but previous calls aren't logged into the system. You explain the situation AGAIN. There is a long pause. The agent says something you can't understand. When you question it, he gets rude. You ask to speak to a supervisor and he says none are available. At a cocktail party later that night, you tell 20 of your closest friends about your customer experience and they all agree never to buy from that company again.

How many companies are providing poor customer experiences? Recent research shows that while 80 percent of companies believe they deliver a superior customer experience, only eight percent of customers agree. The research also shows that 43 percent of customers leave due to the attitudes and behaviors of a company's employees. In service-related situations, the number jumps to 73 percent. Research from Purdue University shows that 85 percent of a customer's perception about a brand is based on their interaction with the call center and agent. If the experience is poor, 63 percent will stop shopping with the company. Now that the SEC requires C-level executives to correlate an executive's performance to the achievement of the company's goals, a company can no longer implement projects without linking them to bottom-line results. At a time when research from analysts shows the customer experience is the only differentiator remaining since competing brands are so similar, how does customer experience affect the bottom line? Executives must look at customer relationship management (CRM) and call centers as cornerstones to providing great customer experiences be it through a new financial lens.

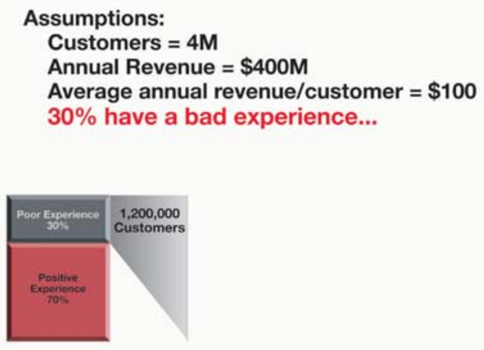
Calculating Revenue Loss Due To Poor Customer Experiences

Research shows that on average:

- 70 percent of customers will have a positive experience;
- 30 percent of customers will have a poor experience; and
- 2 percent of all customers complain.

To calculate the cost of a poor customer experience, let's use a hypothetical company with four million customers and an average annual revenue of $100 per customer, which would result in a potential annual revenue of $400 million. If 30 percent of customers have a bad experience, that amounts to 1.2 million dissatisfied customers. (4 million x .30 = 1.2 million dissatisfied customers. See Figure 1.) If two percent of those complain, that leaves 98 percent who don't say anything, or 1.176 million customers (1.2 million x .98 = 1.176 million. See Figure 2.) The potential revenue lost from that 98 percent is ($64,680,000 + $52,920,000) = $117.6 million (see Figure 3) (1.176 x $100 = $117.6 million).

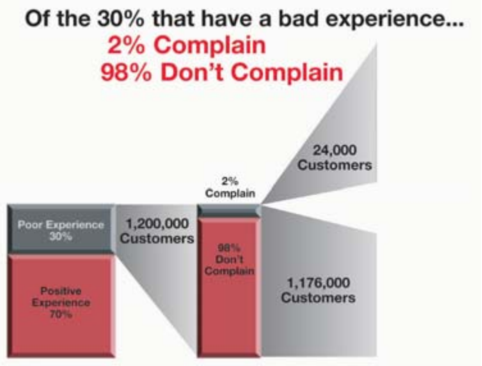
Figure 1



The Cost Of Lost Customers Is Greater Than Just Losing Customers

Research has shown that the costs of handling unsatisfied customers include those of handling contacts twice plus those of lost business. This results in a cost per customer that is two or more times the cost of a satisfied customer. Depending on the industry, between 30 to 70 percent of dissatisfied customers leave, which means new customers must constantly be acquired. The additional money acquiring new customers only pays off if the customer remains loyal. Unfortunately, data

Figure 2



Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

from an analyst's report in 2006 stated that 75 percent of customers who defect to a competitor claim that they had been satisfied with the previous organization. Thus, more money is spent without ROI.

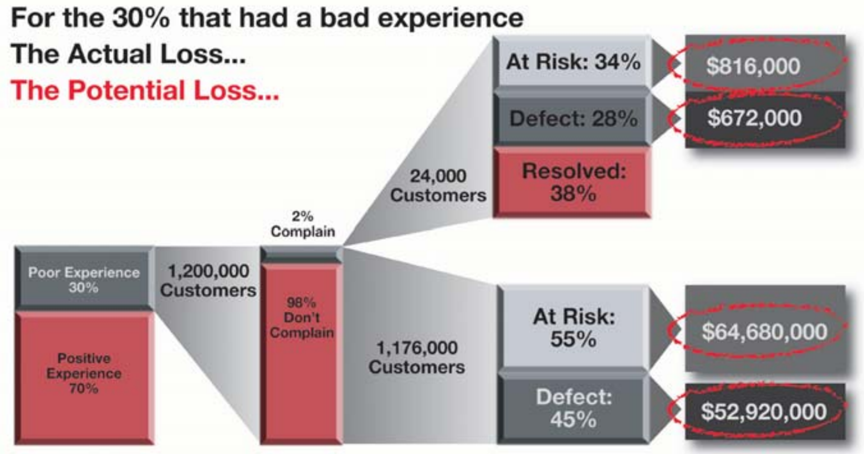
Additionally, effects from negative word-of-mouth propagate the cost of poor customer experiences far beyond one person. Dissatisfied customers tell between 10 to 20 people about their experience. YouTube and other Internet viral methods spread bad word-of-mouth quickly. With all the ways companies are either knowingly or unknowingly increasing losses, it is obvious reducing the number of dissatisfied customers needs to be the number one revenue- and profit-generating objective.

The Gap Is The GAAP

Business has traditionally measured the bottom line in one of two ways:

- Quantity of gross profits and
- Quantity of net profit.

Figure 3



Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) anchored to accounting principles developed centuries ago are out of date because they leave out "customer experience." The lack of customer experience in the GAAP model may be why companies are experiencing poor returns and earning ratios.

In addition to outdated accounting principles, the other bind confronting decision-makers is that of contradictory business goals. On one hand, the edict is to create long-term value and growth. On the other, it's to deliver against short-term goals that reduce costs, but in many cases, like in the call center, destroy long-term value. However, in light of customer-experience data from analysts, the old paradigm of cutting call center costs is bad business.

Brand Equity Secret: Customer-Centric CRM And Customer-Centric Contact Centers

Because business is unsustainable without customers, decisions that drive customers away can't be tolerated. Analysts' research shows as little as one-third to one-half of most companies' stock market value is derived from hard assets such as property, plant and equipment. The growing share of value lies in intellectual property. It is a myth that the customer experience is immeasurable and has little or no affect on the bottom-line. With these types of tangible calculations, call centers and CRM, once thought of as strictly cost centers, become financial assets that either build or destroy brand equity and financial corporate stability.

The Solution: A Financial Customer-Centric CRM And Contact Center Strategy

The five steps to creating a financial customer-centric CRM and call center strategy are:

1. Making business decisions that put customers first;
2. Aligning corporate financial goals with CRM and contact center goals;
3. Designing the customer experience from the customer's point of view;
4. Choosing technology that ONLY enhances the customer experience; and
5. Dedicating resources to managing the change and risk for ROI.

Making Business Decisions That Put Customers First

While the data are staggeringly negative, the good news is there is great opportunity. Because the customer experience is poor across so many industries, companies dedicating their financial strategies to the customer experience will quickly increase the bottom-line by being

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

the first to acquire and retain customers, leaving other companies in the dust. That strategy means EVERY decision in the company, whether about people, processes or technology, has to pass through a superior customer experience lens.

Align Corporate Financial Goals With CRM And Contact Center Goals

A second strategy is aligning company financial goals with CRM and call center expenditures and goals. CRM issues aren't with technology, systems integrators or the company buying products. The problem is CRM and contact center goals aren't directly connected to the bottom-line. In fact, a Peppers and Rogers study showed:

- Three out of four executives would give up economic value in exchange for meeting their numbers;
- More than half would delay starting a project to avoid missing an earnings target; and
- Four out of five would defer maintenance and research spending to meet earnings targets.

Using customer experiences to align company financial goals with the call center and CRM may mean new questions arise from boardrooms and call center mangers alike:

- While these decisions may result in reduced operating costs (relieving short-term financial corporate pressures), do they increase revenue, customer loyalty and repurchase probability?
- How will these decisions affect the relationship and experience with a customer or the brand's value and thus the shareholder's value, market share and profits?

Designing The Customer Experience From The Customer's Point Of View

Companies new to the concept of designing customer experiences may think customer experience management is too vague to be designed. We can look to companies like Disney to know it isn't. Consider that each time a customer comes into contact with a business, the customer's experience results in an opinion. The customer's collective set of experiences shapes their image of the brand. The trick is to make sure at every customer point — phone, fax, e-mail, Web, chat, etc. — the experience exceeds the customer's expectation. These touch points must be assessed with respect to customers' expectations via feedback.

Choosing Technology That ONLY Enhances The Customer Experience

Many companies spend millions on large software implementations — CRM, call center, ERP, etc., without an ROI. There are huge debates about why this continues to happen. CRM technology is largely responsible for the customer experience, but it can only enable people in the company to be more efficient and effective. If technology is to provide an ROI, an understanding of the connection between people, process and technology is required. The features and functions of the technology must provide customer-centric benefits. The decision criteria in choosing technology must then weigh the pros and cons with the weight given to creating long-term, loyalty-inducing customer experiences. Because most technology solutions cannot deliver great customer experiences without some level of customization, resources for customizing are more standard than not.

Technology and Customer Experience: Put Yourself in Your Customers' Shoes. A great way to understand how technology affects the customer experience is recall the last time you called an 800 number. Two good examples of how CRM technology affects the customer experience are computer-telephony integration (CTI) and knowledge management.

The Benefit of True Computer-Telephony Integration. Despite the fact a customer punched in her account number on the phone keypad, why do some agents ask for the same information? The reason is CTI functionality — the more functionality, the higher the cost. Low-level CTI functionality just routes the call to an agent. Higher-level functionality means the call is routed to the most skilled, knowledgeable agent and the keyed information is delivered to the agent's desktop. The agent sees the customer's name, keyed information, the last time they called, whether there's an outstanding order and if it was resolved. That's how technology creates fantastic customer experiences. Thus, the higher cost of the CTI technology must be evaluated against the decision to deliver an irritating, brand-eroding customer experience.

The Benefit of Using a Contact Center Knowledge Management System With NLP Search Technology. Now assume the call is with the right agent and they can see the information. How can technology help that agent answer questions? Let's say a cell phone company is competing in a tight market. Their increase in market share is directly related to new products (like Internet access, e-mailing, etc.) and new service plans (for the family, business travelers, nationwide roaming, etc.) so every three to four months marketing launches new ones.

Now picture the agent trying to keep up with all the new products and features in enough detail to answer any question that gets asked. It is nearly impossible for an agent to memorize that information or find it on a cheat sheet at his or her desk.

If the agent, as part of the desktop application suite, has a robust knowledge management (KM) system with natural language processing (NLP) search capability, he or she can quickly search for answers. KM and NLP search technology is also important for searches conducted on the company's Web site. Research shows that nearly half of Web-based transactions are completed with help of an agent because of poor search technology choices. NLP technology, in contrast to keyword searching, provides higher customer satisfaction and more first-time resolution, but is also more expensive and takes more time to implement. Here, the cost of a poor customer experience must be weighed against the cost of technology driving that poor experience as well as the cost of driving calls to the call center.

Additionally, if agents are trained and given time to learn how to use the features of the new technology, the agent becomes an effective, efficient user of the technology, which is when the ROI kicks in. If not,

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

customers get wrong and/or inconsistent answers. Studies show agents become stressed when they can't provide good service and quit as a result, which increases attrition costs. The resulting technology expenditure is a compounded loss, including, but not limited to, the technology cost itself, loss of agent productivity and agent attrition costs, not to mention the cost of a poor customer experience.

The higher cost of the CTI technology must be evaluated against the decision to deliver an irritating, brand-eroding customer experience.

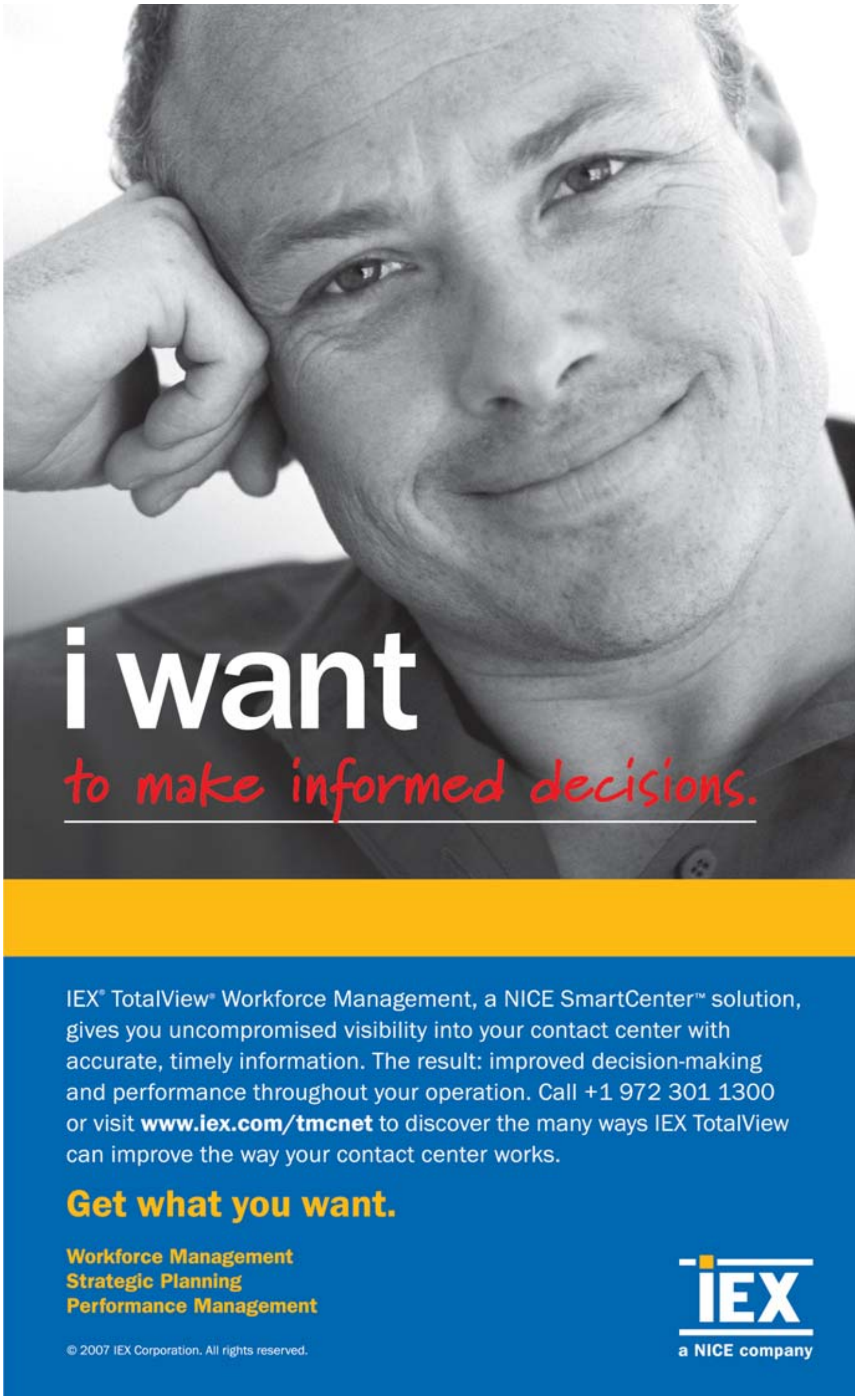
Dedicate Resources To Managing The Change And Risk To ROI

Today's executives are accountable for delivering real financial results from their investments in corporate initiatives by SEC regulations. Because compensation decisions need to be grounded by strong business cases, rationale and accountability, executives not only need a new process to ensure the objectives, goals and initiatives are reached, but they also need a reliable method to ascertain risk and mitigate it, as well as an analytical measurement method and tools to determine the economic value provided to shareholders. CRM or call center projects impact many departments, so an integrated approach to measuring and managing change is required. By doing so, studies have proven companies can obtain greater economic value faster by effectively developing, deploying and aligning a company's assets to the CRM and call center initiative.

The Benefit? Increasing The Bottom Line

By investing in the contact center, agents as brand ambassadors, and effective and efficient CRM systems, a company can quickly add to the bottom line. But employees must have the right tools to deliver the promise of a great customer experience. What is it worth to your company to ensure customers are receiving the best care and experiencing customer service excellence? Your bottom line?

Natalie L. Petouhoff, Ph.D. is a director and thought leader with Hitachi consulting. She writes white papers, articles and books based on her many years of practical experience in CRM, change management, customer experience and contact centers. Brian R. Johnson is a managing vice president for Hitachi Consulting. He is responsible for profitable growth and intellectual property development in the areas of sales, marketing and customer service optimization and automation. Hitachi Consulting provides business and IT solutions to Global 2000 companies.



IEX® TotalView® Workforce Management, a NICE SmartCenter™ solution, gives you uncompromised visibility into your contact center with accurate, timely information. The result: improved decision-making and performance throughout your operation. Call +1 972 301 1300 or visit **www.iex.com/tmcnet** to discover the many ways IEX TotalView can improve the way your contact center works.

Get what you want.

Workforce Management
Strategic Planning
Performance Management

© 2007 IEX Corporation. All rights reserved.

IEX
a NICE company

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Upcoming TMCnet Webinar Schedule

Ensuring Call Quality With SIP Trunking

Sponsored by:

REIGNMAKER COMMUNICATIONS®

EDGEWATER NETWORKS, INC.

NOVEMBER 13, 2007
9:00am PT/ 12:00pm ET

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/reignmaker

Rethinking the Case for Hosted IVR: VoIP Impact on Transport Cost Changes the Equation

Sponsored by:

FIRST DATA®
Making global commerce happen.SM

NOVEMBER 13, 2007
11:00am PT/ 2:00pm ET

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/firstdata

Host Your Own Webinar!

To schedule your Webinar,
call: Rick Bisesto, TMC -
Webinar Division,
(203) 852-6800, ext. 211 or
e-Mail rbisesto@tmcnet.com

VoIP Security Best Practices: Preventing Attacks and Managing Risk

Sponsored by:

Sipera Systems

Archived • View Today!

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/sipera2

Hosted vs. On Premise IVR? Four Deployment Strategies that Protect You from Risk and Change

Sponsored by:

Voxify®

Archived • View Today!

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/voxify

Series III:
Building Applications with SIP – Conferencing/ Collaboration Solutions

Sponsored by:

AudioCodes

Archived • View Today!

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/audiocodes3

Making Money with VoIP – Selling to IT Decision Makers

Sponsored by:

speakeasy®

Archived • View Today!

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/speakeasy

Call Center Consolidation 2.0 In Practice: How enterprises are implementing and benefiting from Consolidation 2.0

Sponsored by:

CosmoCom™

Archived • View Today!

www.tmcnet.com/webinar/cosmocom

By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

Leveraging Speech Applications In The Contact Center, Part One

Betsy, an inbound contact center agent, handles about 100 calls a day. She is always polite and courteous, except for perhaps late in the day when she gets tired of reading the same script repeatedly. She gets two weeks' paid vacation, 10 paid holidays, and a half hour for lunch every day. On average, she calls in sick five days a year, is late to work 30 times, takes a 15 minute break every four hours and goes to the rest room two times per shift. She gets paid $15 an hour and requires health insurance for herself and her family. She asks for a raise about every six months.

Gladys, (news - alert) on the other hand, can handle thousands of calls a day — hundreds simultaneously. She is polite and courteous and never gets tired of reading the same script. She never takes a vacation, doesn't celebrate holidays, never eats lunch and never calls in sick. She works 24 hour shifts and never takes a break. She costs about 20 cents per transaction and requires no health insurance.

So is Betsy jealous of Gladys? Of course not …Gladys is a machine. She is an automated agent — a software solution that uses speech recognition to carry out "natural" interactions with people over the phone. If anything, Betsy likes Gladys because she makes her job easier.

Gladys can help customers with basic information and transactions. She can tell a customer when his order was shipped, what items he ordered and how much his credit card was charged. She can help the customer find a particular product in the catalog or on the Web site, tell him what sizes and colors it comes in, arrange for shipping, take the customer's credit card information and complete the transaction. Betsy and her fellow human agents are no longer bogged down with routine transactions and can instead concentrate on handling more complex interactions which have a higher transactional value. Thus, a contact center can blend automated agents with live agents to whatever degree of efficacy it desires, automating those interactions which are suitable for automation, while leaving more important transactions for the live agents.

When a customer needs something that Gladys can't deliver, or says something that she doesn't understand, she automatically transfers the call to Betsy. And when Betsy gets the call, she has all of the customer's call history right on her desktop, including information on their past transactions, plus everything Gladys told the customer and what offers she has already made. With this detailed information, Betsy can quickly pick up where Gladys left off and help the customer get what he needs. And if at the end of the call there's a need to complete another transaction, Betsy can hand the call back to Gladys, who is happy to finish the sale, achieving the much sought-after first-call resolution.

Speech recognition has advanced in recent years to the point where today's automated agents are able to ask callers open-ended questions, accurately interpret their responses and determine why they're calling.

Welcome to the world of contact center automation, where human and machine work in harmony to provide superior customer experience. Playing an increasingly important role in this automated world is speech recognition and analytics. Speech recognition is what Gladys uses to interpret what customers are saying so she can carry out their commands and give them the proper information. Meanwhile, speech analytics is what contact centers use to "mine" recorded calls to detect problems with agent/customer interactions and to gain insight into customer behavior which the enterprise can then use to drive key business decisions. Speech recognition and speech analytics are two distinct yet similar disciplines, each yielding benefits for the contact center in the form of operational efficiencies, higher customer satisfaction and increased profits. Let's take a closer look at the ways speech technology is being leveraged in the contact center today.

Speech recognition has advanced in recent years to the point where today's automated agents are able to ask callers open-ended questions, accurately interpret their responses and determine why they're calling. This achievement springs not only from significant advancements in the core technology, but also from innovations in application design, user interface design and the speech science capabilities used to optimize the software for specific user demographics. Speech technology vendors have also made strides in recent years in terms of technical optimizations, and through experience, speech software vendors and their customers have gained a better understanding of where it makes sense to use speech applications and where it doesn't.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Natural Language Capabilities

Their ability to carry out more natural conversations with callers is perhaps the most impressive aspect of today's speech recognition solutions. Thanks to the advances in large vocabulary continuous speech recognition (LVCSR) systems, automated agents can now ask open ended questions such as "How may I help you today?" and either provide the appropriate response or, in the event the system doesn't understand the caller or can't help, steer the call toward the appropriate agent. When implemented properly, these speech self-service solutions can lead to higher customer satisfaction, as the customer is no longer limited to a static set of options, one of which must be selected using the telephone keypad in order to proceed through the call.

In addition, because they are becoming so proficient at interpreting what the caller is saying, today's speech recognition solutions are able to serve as the ultimate automated "switchboard operators," in that they can intelligently route calls to anywhere in the organization, based on the words and phrases a caller uses. As such, organizations are increasingly using self-service speech applications to unify all their numbers (such as numbers for separate departments, divisions or subsidiaries) under a single toll-free number which can be used as a starting place for all incoming calls. And unlike a live switchboard operator, the system can handle sudden spikes in call volume, potentially handling hundreds or even thousands of calls coming in at once.

Daniel Faulkner, senior solutions marketing manager at Nuance Communications, said today's automated agents deliver tremendous value to the enterprise, just through their advanced call routing capabilities. "There's an awful lot of error in human-based routing," he explained. "And for the customer, it can result in some pretty horrible experiences."

An example of this, Faulkner said, is the typical scenario where a customer gets transferred to the wrong department, but then the agent in that department cannot transfer the call back, so the customer must hang up and dial back into the system. By centralizing all of an organization's numbers, the caller can always get back to the main system, where the automated agent can then re-direct the call.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Faulkner said another big advantage of today's automated agents is that they let the customer decide how he or she wants the interaction to go. This is particularly helpful in situations where customers use a variety of terms to describe what they're looking for. For example, someone calling a tech support center "might call in and explain the problem in extremely technical terms — whereas someone else might use very non-technical terms." Either way, the speech engine can accurately interpret what is being said and route the call intelligently.

"We've sunk a considerable investment in an area of technology called conversation management, or dialog management," Faulkner said. "And that's a really exciting technology because it makes our solutions much more robust to certain types of errors. When people ask related questions that an older, more rigid speech solution couldn't handle, we're finding that we can now handle those. We can cope with a lot more of those areas where people sort of go off topic … we're finding that we can handle that non-sequitur question, and have them continue through the system, rather than pass them off to an agent."

Faulkner added that Nuance's solution has evolved to the point where it can either let the customer guide the interaction, or it will "drive" the conversation and the customer can sit back and enjoy the ride. "What we really want to do is enable people to carry out the transaction how they want to carry it out," he said. "Our goal is to make our solution so robust that people can carry out the type of interaction they want."

Rapid Configurability

On the flip side of letting the customer drive the interaction is the new trend of giving the enterprise greater control over the way the speech application works. According to Hollis Chin, marketing director for Voxify, his company's new release was designed to give the contact center "full control to make real-time changes to speech applications."

"We have a vision of what we're calling 'consolization,'" Chin explained, "which is essentially putting Web consoles into the hands of the contact center managers — who want the control, the self-sufficiency and the immediacy of making their own changes to the speech applications."

It's pretty well known now that the biggest source of fraud for credit cards in a phone-based ordering system is the agent taking the credit card number. Because what they do is write down your information on a piece of sticky paper, and they know everything about you

Roger Nunn, Voxify's (news - alert) VP of sales, said providing this level of flexibility not only gives the organization the ability to adjust call routing on-the-fly, it also enables companies to quickly add or take away information about their offerings, and change the way they market their products. "Your user interface says a lot about your brand," Nunn said, "I've read some articles which talk about self-service as being a continuation of your differentiator. So these things are no longer necessarily just contact center-centric. They can be an extension of other types of self-service you're offering to your clients. Most of us think of the Web interfaces as self-service interfaces — but you need to offer similar features and capabilities through your speech-based self-service as well," he said. "Sure, it's your brand, your message — but it's also about the ability to change your offer. The example I give is: nobody today will have the same Web site six months from now. Those are living breathing things which respond very dynamically to the market, to the customer, to the products that are being offered and so on. And we believe that speech-based self-service needs to do the same thing: the old boring IVR that is the same as it was two years ago isn't going to hack it."

Secure Transactions

As Nunn explained, part of the beauty of automated agents is that they can handle transactions in a highly secure way — in that a live agent never needs to be involved in the transaction. "We get a lot of customers coming to us today to talk about PCI (payment card industry) security standards," he said. "This is the data security piece — this question of whether you are securing your customers' credit card information. It's pretty well known now that the biggest source of fraud for credit cards in a phone-based ordering system is the agent taking the credit card number. Because what they do is write down your information on a piece of sticky paper, and they know everything about you, they've got your name, your card number, your mother's maiden name, that funky three-digit number on the back of the card, your mailing address. And an amazing number of them come into these centers, take down the information, walk out the front door and commit fraud."

With today's automated agents, you can have the system take all of the credit card information and process the interaction in a secure way. Nunn said this gives customers greater peace of mind and increases the value proposition for speech self-service systems. "Even if you want your agents to take the order, why not automate the back-end piece?" he asked. "That way, as soon as the customer says 'I'm done. I don't want to order anything else,' you can send them over to an automated system that takes care of the transaction in a secure way that it not recorded. So you get loss avoidance, as well as cost avoidance. And customer satisfaction is increased, as no human is involved in the actual transaction."

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Automate Outbound Campaigns

Another area where speech technology is creating tremendous efficiencies in the contact center is its application in outbound systems. Today, it is not at all unusual for centers to conduct fully automated outbound sales and marketing campaigns, using a combination of predictive dialers, IVR systems and automated agents. This is where a customer receives a call at home, listens to a recorded message and then interacts with an automated agent who first determines the caller's interest in the product or service being offered, handles any questions the customer might have and processes the transaction. In the event the system doesn't understand or cannot help the customer, the call is typically then transferred to a live agent.

"With these new outbound systems, you can automate the entire call," Nunn said. "For example, if I was a pharmacy company, and I knew that your prescription had expired, or was about to expire, I have two choices: I can wait until you walk back into the pharmacy and renew it, or I can outbound call you. Now in the old days I'd have to manually call you and leave a message and say 'this a courtesy call from so-and-so and I just wanted to remind you that your prescription needs to be refilled, and you can call us back at this number and re-order it.' But why wouldn't you go one step further and have the system ask you whether or not you want to renew it? And if you do, the system can ask the customer whether they want to pick it up in the same location or have you mail it to them. And if it's going to be mailed to you, 'What's the address where I should mail it? And by the way, I see I have a credit card on file.' So I never needed a live person — we see that as the next step."

Co-worker Or Replacement?

Obviously the main thrust behind adoption and implementation of speech-based self-service solutions is to reduce headcount and save on salary costs. On average, staffing represents anywhere from 70 to 90 percent of a contact center's operating budget, so it makes sense that companies are looking for ways to automate processes.

"Yes, we do have numerous customers who have reduced contact center staffing through the efficiencies gained by implementing speech solutions," Faulkner said. "There is an example of that — Lloyds PLC, a bank in the UK, actually shut down one of its outsourced contact centers because they were having so much success with their speech recognition solution in the UK." Although reducing headcount is one of the main selling points for speech self-service solutions, most companies aren't looking to publicize layoffs. Furthermore, as Faulkner explained, reducing the headcount "isn't always the end game for the enterprise." Sometimes organizations do it purely for the purpose of providing improved customer service.

I could build a Russian self-service application, but if I only get four calls a year in my Alabama call center, is it really worth the money I'm going to spend to do it?

"A lot of our customers today are prioritizing the customer experience over efficiencies," Faulkner said, adding that many of Nuance's customers "have us hold back on the efficiencies for the purpose of pleasing the customer." He said even though a call can be completely automated and doesn't have to include a live agent, many companies see a high value in putting a live agent on the line at some point during the interaction. So in most cases, contact centers are using a mix of automation and live agents for the purpose of reducing agent call time.

"We can provide automation rates that are down around 20 percent, all the way up to nearly 100 percent [of the interaction], depending on what task is being automated," he said. "We tend to automate tasks that a) happen a lot — you really only want to invest automation if you're going to automate something that your customer frequently like to do; b) that lend themselves to automation; and c) that deliver a strong ROI — in other words, that it is of a duration or complexity that makes it easy to automate."

"If I'm going to offer a self-service capability, the types of transactions I want to automate are the ones where there are enough transactions that it is worth the trouble," added Voxify's Nunn. "And the example I give is, I could build a Russian self-service application, but if I only get four calls a year in my Alabama call center, is it really worth the money I'm going to spend to do it? So you want to only automate the things that are worth automating."

Nunn pointed out that some transactional calls are very cost-effective to automate. "If I'm going to buy a diamond, I might want to talk to the person live, and they're going to tell me a lot about it," he said. "And the transactional value is so high that it is worth customer touch. But suppose my average transaction value is about a buck. I'm going to want to automate that all the time, because it pays me to invest in that sort of thing."

Part Two of this article will be presented in the January 2008 issue of *Customer Interaction Solutions.*

The author can be reached at pbarnard@tmcnet.com.

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

There are two kinds of businesses in the world.

Those that get online marketing, and those that very clearly don't.

In his October editorial for *Customer Interaction Solutions*, Rich Tehrani wrote about companies that answer customer e-mail promptly and that he, and millions of others, were more likely to do business with companies that are responsive to online inquiries. He recounted a story of a woman who attended one of his speeches that became very upset with this idea. She thought that it was a "bad idea" that companies allow customers to "get used to" having their e-mail dealt with promptly. Clearly, people like this missed the basic lessons of business school: if you don't give your customers what they want, your competitor will. Wishing this away won't get you anywhere.

I'm always struck by how some companies seem to really strive to innovate to broaden their marketing across all channels, but in particular toward their Web channels. I'm impressed with the companies that link their television commercials to their online presence, like Sharp and its "More To See" commercials (www.moretosee.com) that begin telling a story in the commercial and ask consumers to visit the Web site to see how the story turns out.

A boring radio ad plus a boring print ad plus a boring television commercial plus a boring Web site do NOT equal cross-channel marketing.

Granted, Sharp has an enormous marketing budget and a lot of innovative people to come up with cross-channel marketing ideas.

Other companies are using this same method to drive traffic to their Web sites, and it appears to be working for them. Large companies are using YouTube to distribute commercials that could not be shown on television for reasons of language, a harder-edged message or non-family-appropriate humor. They are generally quite funny, and prompt viewers to share them with one another in a true viral marketing model.

But what impresses me even more is when smaller companies come up with fun ideas to drive traffic to their Web sites.

I get marketing e-mails from Sure Fit, a catalog company that sells slip covers. Now, I'm not sure how big Sure Fit is, but I suspect there are no presidential cabinet members on its board of directors, if it even has a board of directors, and the brand is hardly a household name. The e-mail sent to me read, "Celebrate Sure Fit's Ugly Couch Contest Grand Prize Drawing and Save 20 Percent On All Orders!"

An ugly couch contest? What fun! A little surfing led me to a page with photos of previous years' winners: www.tmcnet.com/1269.1. I'm sure you'll agree, those are some damn ugly sofas. 2001's winner, complete with chain accents, is a particular favorite of mine.

You are probably tempted to visit Sure Fit's Web site now, aren't you? Even if only to see the ugly sofas. Maybe you have a contender for next year's contest lurking in your family room. Would you have gone to the Web site otherwise? Not unless you were really on an active hunt to buy slipcovers. But now that you're there, you might find you need a slipcover. And if you do…hey, you can get 20 percent off.

Too many companies think cross-channel marketing is achieved by repeating the same boring marketing message across multiple marketing vehicles. A boring radio ad plus a boring print ad plus a boring television commercial plus a boring Web site do NOT equal cross-channel marketing.

As far as I'm concerned, the marketing world needs more ugly couches. And you…you really DO need a slipcover, don't you?

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

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

TMC

EAST

INTERNET TELEPHONY®

Conference & EXPO

Our 17th Event!

Discover New Solutions

Meet Global Enterprise Buyers

Find Resellers & Partners

Establish New Relationships

Featuring:

TMC Call Center 2.0™

at ITEXPO

January 22-25, 2008

Miami Beach Convention Center

Miami Beach, Florida, USA

Enterprise
SMB
Reseller
Service Provider

Diamond Sponsor

aculab

www.ITEXPO.com

To Exhibit or Sponsor contact Dave Rodriguez 203.852.6800 ext. 146 • drodriguez@tmcnet.com

THE INTEGRATED MARKETPLACE

DIALING EQUIPMENT

Predictive Dialer Owners, Is your Long Distance carrier selling you short?

($.01 per call) minimum

Call us to see how our 6 decimal billing, (.001XXX per call) minimum

Together with our low rates, low loop prices, and multi-carrier diversity can save you 80% on your predictive dialer calls!

PARALLEL TECHNOLOGIES

Broadwing • Global Crossing • Paetec • Qwest • XO

800-846-3978 Ext 253

LD@ptcom.com

TELESERVICES AGENCIES — OUTSOURCING

iiiCii InfoCision

THE highest quality call center company in the world!®

The ROI you want from the company you trust.

1-866-670-4IMC | www.infocision.com

INFOCISION MANAGEMENT CORPORATION
25 years
1982 - 2007

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Professional Telesales/Customer Service Management Searches

- Search consultants to most of the top ten service agencies in the U.S. and over 50 of the Fortune 500 companies. Small companies, too.
- All custom searches using a 25,000 resume file plus extensive proactive calling.
- Dedicated telesales/customer service searches since 1981… the first and the best!

R.L. Bencin & Associates

2616 Hidden Canyon Dr.
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-6726

Resumes welcomed!
E-mail: rlbencin@netzero.net
Web site: www.rlbencin.com

IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: **CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions**®, Technology Marketing Corporation, One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A.

To subscribe, call toll-free: 800-243-6002. If busy, call 203-852-6800 or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, $49. All Canadian subscribers, $49. All Foreign (air mail), $85. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

ADVERTISING INDEX

Advertiser/ Web Address	Page Number
Autonomy etalk *www.etalk.com*	21
IEX, A NICE Company *www.iex.com*	25
InfoCision Management Corp. *www.infocision.com*	cover 2
Interactive Intelligence *www.inin.com*	35
ITEXPO East *www.itexpo.com*	33
NICE Systems *www.nice.com*	5
Oracle. *www.oracle.com*	Cover 4
Packet8 *www.packet8.net*	7
Plantronics Inc. *www.plantronics.com*	17
Sennheiser Communications *www.sennheiserusa.com*	19
Stratasoft *www.stratasoft.com*	16
Thomas L. Cardella Associates *www.tlcassociates.com*	3
TMCnet Webinars *www.tmcnet.com/webinar*	26, 27
UCN *www.ucn.net*	9
Verint Witness Actionable Solutions *www.verint.com*	Cover 3

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

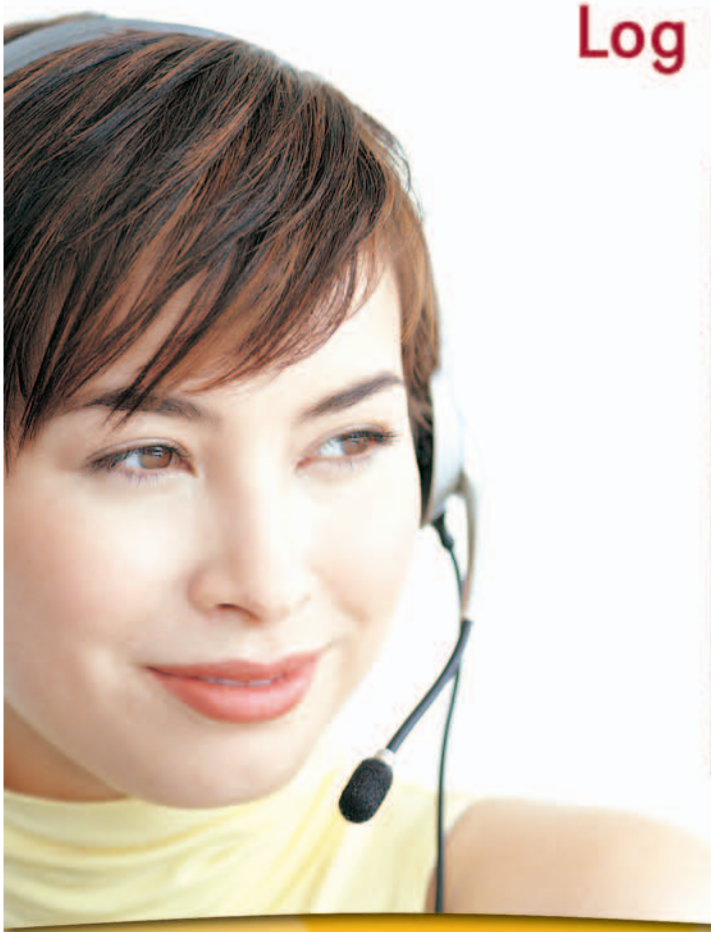
Sponsored By:

Interactive Intelligence

The Multimedia Contact Center Solutions Experts

[Contact Center Research]

http://callcenterinfo.tmcnet.com/
Log On Today!



Contact Center Research - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Technology Marketing Corporation
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Address http://callcenterinfo.tmcnet.com/
SERVICE PROVIDER
ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPER
RESELLER
GOVERNMENT
CONSUMER
About TMC
TMCnet Services
Advertise
Blogs
News Alerts
Free eNews
Events
Publications
Whitepapers
Content Submission
Subscribe Today!
Channels Home
Home
VoIP
CRM
Call Center
Contact Center Research
What's New
Events
Publications
Forums
Contributors
VoIP Forums
Asterisk Forum : User Community
Sipura Technology Forum : User Community
Skype Forum
Triple Play Forum
Call Center Forums
General, FAQs, How to
Wanted Ads/Classifieds
WiMAX Forum
[new rule] Buy an IP system, not a label.
Interactive Intelligence Inc® | Deliberately Innovative
[new rules for IP business communication]
[new rule] Agent effectiveness will boost your bottom line.
http://voip-forum.tmcnet.com/voip-forum/forum/
Internet

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

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

Technology Still Matters in the Contact Center
April 26,2006

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

IVR and the Great Disconnect
April 20,2006

SAP Enters On-demand CRM Market
April 19,2006

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

Powered By: TMCnet™

Ask The Expert

A Special Editorial Series Sponsored By Interactive Intelligence

Integration For A Business Communications Solution

By Tim Passios
Director of Product Management
Interactive Intelligence

Q: We've short-listed a few vendors to talk to about a communications system for our contact center, and integration is definitely a concern. Any insights you can share would be appreciated to help in our selection process.

A: Even without knowing which vendors you have on your list, let me offer an initial word of caution: If they don't mention back-office systems in their integration pitch, give them a low score. Typical proprietary vendor-speak often sounds like, "We can handle the entire project and integrate to your existing PBX, ACD, third-party systems, etc. to reduce implementation costs and protect your investment." The problem is, such vendor-speak focuses only on telephony-level integrations, and not on the back-end systems integration many contact centers rely on to manage information alongside customer interactions.

> **As common technical and business sense will tell you, the single-point integration approach of an application suite and all-in-one communications platform makes it easier to administer an overall system and reduce costs.**

In fact, proprietary "multi-point" legacy vendors have telephony-level integrations down, since they typically require many different boxes (often from different vendors) to round out their offering. Business-level integrations, however, just aren't their strong suit. Consider this analogy for example. Say you're remodeling your house. Would you rather deal with one contractor who can drywall, paint and re-do ceilings and floors all extremely well for a fair price, or a contractor who brings in a bunch of subcontractors who raise costs, increase timelines and point fingers at one another when things don't go well?

You should take the same approach when selecting a business communications vendor. Make sure your list of vendors includes a couple whose solutions come from the new breed of all-in-one application suites that are far more centralized and adaptable. Here's why.

Many communications suites now on the market are supported by an underlying unified platform architecture which, unlike multi-point legacy systems, allows an organization to integrate an entire suite of applications through a single integration point. Moreover, that same central integration point is where business applications and back-office systems fit in, usually with little or no need for customization or expensive programming.

As common technical and business sense will tell you, the single-point integration approach of an application suite and all-in-one communications platform makes it easier to administer an overall system and reduce costs. By "overall" system, that means all the types of back-end systems a modern contact center relies on from day to day, which makes a single point of integration invaluable.

- Reporting and analytics;
- Workforce management;
- Knowledge bases and knowledge management, including e-mail and Web-based auto-response applications;
- Customer databases;
- CRM solutions, increasingly with screen-pop, screen automation and embedded call control;
- Unified messaging;
- Directories;
- Accounting;
- Web services, such as online forms and surveys; and
- Office services, such as those offered in Microsoft's Office Communications Server.

Given all the back-end apps your contact center might incorporate, ask the vendors you're considering to spell out exactly how their solutions will integrate to such business systems. Then ask them some other questions, too.

Security. If VoIP (define - news - alert) security is a concern, ask the vendor how they plan to keep your voice traffic secure, particularly if their solution will be routing VoIP traffic across systems for ACD, IVR, call recording, outbound predictive dialing and other functions. In a multi-point system configuration, integration complexity and costs related to VoIP security increase significantly.

Standards. Find out what standards each vendor's solutions support to see how complex back-office integrations are going to be. Any integrations requiring third-party gateways or middleware (APIs) instead of standard protocols end up increasing the implementation time frame and leave you to rely on third-parties for patches. Headaches usually increase as well.

Real-time business intelligence. Knowledge bases, e-mail and Web auto-response systems, post-call and online satisfaction surveys, etc. come in to play with this issue on the table. Again, make as sure as possible a new system can accommodate these and other types of intelligence-oriented applications.

Whereas a communications system's PBX, ACD, e-mail, chat and associated components drive the interaction process with customers, back-office applications are required to process and manage the business information interactions generate. A strong argument can therefore be made that business applications are as critical to a contact center as interaction applications, and if you can't integrate them to the system a vendor is offering, mark the vendor off your list.

Tim Passios is Director of Product Marketing for Interactive Intelligence Inc. and has more than 16 years' experience in the contact center industry. Interactive Intelligence is a leading provider of IP business communications software and services for the contact center and the enterprise, with more than 2,500 installations in nearly 70 countries. For more information, contact Interactive Intelligence (news - alert) at info@inin.com or (317) 872-3000.

Go to Table of Contents | Go to Ad Index

Now you have the power to improve everything

VERINT + WITNESS SYSTEMS®

Two industry leaders, **Verint** and **Witness Systems**, have joined together to give enterprises a newfound power.

The power to improve everything.

By bringing together workforce optimization and actionable intelligence, Verint enables a new vision for the customer-centric enterprise.

Our vision is built on an unparalleled portfolio of solutions that deliver the insights you need to delight your customers day in and day out — from the contact center, branch and back office to every customer touch point across your enterprise.

Discover how Verint can help you delight your customers and drive outstanding business results. Discover the power to improve everything. Go to **verint.com/improve or call 1-800-4-VERINT.**

Recording

Quality Management

eLearning

Analytics

Performance Management

Workforce Management

Customer Feedback

VERINT
POWERING ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE®

©2007 Verint Systems Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.

Siebel CRM On Demand

CRM On Demand

	Oracle/Siebel	Salesforce.com
Pre-Built Industry Specific Solutions	✓	
Pre-Built Integrations to ERP	✓	
Built-In Email Marketing	✓	
Expand to a Complete Application Suite	✓	
Hosted On or Off Site	✓	
Secure Multi-Tenant	✓	
Private Database Option	✓	

Oracle Customer Relationship Management
Over 4.6 Million Satisfied Users

ORACLE®

CRMOnDemand.com
or call 1.866.906.7878

Copyright © 2007. Oracle is a registered trademark of Oracle Corporation and/or its affiliates. Other names may be trademarks of their respective owners.