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April 2008 • Vol. 26/No. 11
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- The 23rd Annual Top 50 Inbound Teleservices Agency Ranking
- An Update On The Federal Do-Not-Call Registry

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The Call Center & The Economy Meeting Today's Challenges Head On

Also In This Issue:

- The Past, Present And Future Of Call Routing: A Talk With Aspect
- The 23rd Annual Top 50 Inbound Teleservices Agency Ranking
- An Update On The Federal Do-Not-Call Registry

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➤ **Publisher's Outlook**



Nadji Tehrani, CEO,
Technology Marketing Corp.

Managing Contact/CRM Centers In A Slowing Economy

To be sure, managing any business entity during slowing economies is extremely challenging, to say the least. And managing call centers or CRM centers is no exception.

Having said the above, once again, we have decided to conduct a survey of industry leaders to bring you several different perspectives on how to better manage your call center through difficult times. In this editorial, I have provided you with a synopsis of some of the comments that various leading companies have provided us. In addition to reading this editorial, I urge you to also read the complete comments by industry experts in an article on page 30 written by Tracey Schelmetic, Editorial Director of *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine.

As you read what follows, you will notice that a variety of technologies, strategies and methodologies are offered by the leading technology and teleservices providers to help you better manage your contact/CRM centers during a slowing economy.

First things first:

- Obviously, it stands to reason that in any economy, customer care and customer service, including customer satisfaction, are paramount requirements for any business. In fact, as I have stated in many of these editorials, "Companies live or die from repeat business and repeat business comes from customer care and customer satisfaction." Therefore, it is vital to make sure that you offer the best possible customer service and customer satisfaction so that you can maintain your present customers.
- Lead generation is also vital in slowing economies, or any economy for that matter. During any type of economy, companies can lose as much as 50 percent of their existing customers simply by natural attrition. This percentage could go even higher in slowing economies. Therefore, common sense dictates that lost business must be replaced by new business. And the only way to obtain new business is to continuously pursue a program of creating qualified sales leads in order to bring in new business.

Having said all of the above, I would like to share with you excerpts from comments made from leading technology and teleservices providers of our industry. These comments are presented in alphabetical order by company and the Web sites of the companies in question are provided at the beginning of every company's comment:

Altitude Software (News - Alert) North America (www.altitude.com) – Mark Lepko, President

"Today, there is a clear shift in contact center operations, with contact centers focusing on first-call resolution as a priority, aiming to reduce costs and maximize agent performance. Studies indicate that, in some situations, 50 percent of calls could have been avoided if correctly handled on a first call."

Aspect (News - Alert) Software (www.aspect.com) – Tom Chamberlain, Director of Business Process Marketing

"In a slowing economy, companies are clearly focused on increasing efficiency and maximizing resources in all operational areas. In the contact center, this means automating the right processes to enhance service levels, not hinder them; leveraging automation technology like predictive dialers and voice portals; taking advantage of other applications that can increase first-call resolution."

Avaya (News - Alert) (www.avaya.com) – Lou Ann Jones, Director, Customer Contact Solutions

"Self-service with speech is key – we can serve a customer effectively while minimizing human intervention which is a substantial cost saving and has a rapid return on investment, and increases agent productivity and agent satisfaction. We know that "voice" is king. Getting and maintaining customers is a competitive necessity – well executed technology like self-service and proactive outbound contact help

keep the competitive edge while keeping an eye on the bottom line.”

IEX (News - Alert) Corp.
(www.iex.com) – Rick Glew,
VP of Marketing

“Customer satisfaction and keeping a watchful eye on the bottom line are no doubt important in both good economic times and bad. Operational expenses seem to undergo extra scrutiny. In the contact center, that often means taking a fresh look at the organization's biggest expense – the agent population – whether or not the team is operating at its full potential. After a thorough evaluation of scheduling, service and skill gaps, many organizations turn to automated workforce management (WFM) tools for improving staff scheduling and agent management, from enhancing agent productivity and boosting morale to lowering costs and increasing customer satisfaction. WFM tools offer substantial bottom-line savings.”

Infocision Management Corp.
(www.infocision.com) – Steve
Boyazis, Executive VP

“There are two investment areas; the first area involves items that build operational efficiency. The second involves the customer relationship tools that help you build a connection with the consumer over multiple interactions. Since about 55 to 65 percent of a call center's cost is in operations, the first choice should be to make sure you are utilizing operating resources as efficiently as possible. Then, if you have a customer base with which you expect to have a long-term relationship, the real ROI comes from business intelligence and anything that helps you build lasting client connections.”

Interactive Intelligence (News - Alert) (www.inin.com) – Matt Taylor,
Product Marketing Manager

“A particularly valuable technology to call centers in a slowing economy is workforce management. It's crucial that when inbound demand slows, call centers are able to quickly and easily adjust staffing requirements by either re-allocating or reducing staff. To maximize the value of WFM, customers should be sure that their system gives them tight integration to their ACD so they can receive accurate and real-time data, thus enabling them to most effectively plan schedules and make changes on-the-fly.”

Loquendo (News - Alert)
(www.loquendo.com) – Paolo
Coppo, Marketing & Business
Development VP

“The necessity of at least partial automation of customer support via CRM (mostly due to economic reasons), is anything but new [and vital in a slowing economy]. There are a huge number of companies that have considerable costs and resources dedicated to call/contact centers and that depend on them for a significant part of their business and support.”

Oracle (News - Alert)
(www.crmondemand.com) –
Ed Margulies, Senior Director
of Product Strategy, CRM
Service Products

“The most valuable technology in call centers in a slowing economy is hosted infrastructure technology and the software-as-a-service (SaaS (News - Alert)) business model that goes along with it. Three big issues; 1) “Try Before You Buy” approaches are often adopted in the area of testing and validating call center technology; 2) “Capital Budget Constraints”; 3) “Workforce Flexibility” – for contact center managers, both recruiting and managing the workforce during economic downturn is crucial. For example, some contact center workers are feeling the pinch of commuting costs and the costs of meals when they are not at home. The cost of gas alone gives prospective employees pause in determining ‘where’ they want to work. With many SaaS solutions, remote agents are enabled, therefore, providing a lower-cost alternative for workers – and especially their employers.”

Touchstar (www.touchstar.com)
– Brian Smits, Global Director
of Marketing

“We are also offering trials of three technology solutions that can immediately drive profitability. The three solutions include: A new Best Time to Call application, a world-class onsite or hosted predictive dialer, and a new affordable unified communications solution: ‘Touchstar Unify.’”

**Verint (News - Alert) Witness
Actionable Solutions (www.verint.com) – Oscar Alban,**
Principal
Global Marketing Consultant

“In today's economy, it's more critical than ever for organizations to focus on not just what is happening, but why. By enabling root-cause analysis, speech and data analytics and customer feedback surveys can help organizations transform customer data – structured and unstructured – into meaningful information. Armed with data, not hunches, organizations can better understand customer service issues and take appropriate action to optimize workforce performance and operational effectiveness.”

Plan Now to Attend Call Center 2.0

Plan now to attend Call Center 2.0 from September 16 to 18, 2008, at the Los Angeles Convention Center in Los Angeles, CA. It will be the industry's preeminent technology conference and expo for contact centers and CRM. Call Center 2.0 traditionally brings nearly 1,000 contact center attendees, which represents the highest number of qualified attendees of any competing conference.

As always, I welcome your comments. Please e-mail me at ntehrani@tmcnet.com. Please make sure to read the complete comments on page 30.

Overseas Teleservices Jobs Returning To U.S. Shores

*By Steve Brubaker, Senior VP Corporate
Affairs, InfoCision Management Corp.*

On Tuesday, January 29, MSNBC ran a news report on telemarketing jobs coming back to the United States from overseas. The report acknowledged the frustration of speaking to a telephone representative that you cannot understand, and concluded what many of us in the teleservices industry already know: Only telephone agents here in America can truly understand the regional and cultural nuances of customers and donors. When it comes to building lasting relationships, companies that utilize teleservices are coming to realize that agents who speak their customers' language can provide the highest level of customer care services, sales and marketing; and bring them a higher return on their investment.

At InfoCision (www.infocision.com), we have seen this change firsthand. InfoCision operates all 32 of our call centers right here in the United States and we pledge to our clients that this fact will never change. Many companies have noticed the domestic advantage we provide and are leaving their offshore outsourcing partners. They see that we can provide them the peace of mind that comes with knowing that their customers are satisfied, their programs comply with government regulations and their customers' privacy is protected.

Considering that fines for non-compliance can reach \$11,000 per call, companies that sacrifice call center quality for short-term savings in operations end up losing customers in the long run, and many companies are beginning to take notice.

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Join us for a live online demo of our all-in-one IP contact center solutions... you even determine the content.

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What's on the Cover — 30

Making More With Less: Contact Center Industry Executive Recommendations For Operating A Call Center In An Economic Downturn

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

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By Dick Bucci, Senior Consultant, The Pelorus Group

What's Plantronics Up To?

In his VoIP blog, Rich Tehrani writes:

Plantronics is planning something big. I have discussed this before and they are staying pretty quiet about what they are working on. Moreover whatever they are doing has been in development for over a year and they aren't close enough to a launch to even drop serious hints.

Two things I do know: they want to be big in CEBP (communications-enabled business processes) space, and they are also looking to extend the headset paradigm.

It is tough to know what they have up their sleeves, but the only hint I have is that when I asked if they are looking to add a heads-up display to the headset, they say they did consider this idea but decided against it.

So I can only conclude they will be getting more deeply into the mobile device market. I suppose there is room for the company in the space occupied by Polycom. Remember that last year they denied this was the case. They could make desk sets and handsets, but they could go one step further and add speech recognition and a layer of middleware allowing the merging of mobile and fixed line phones.

Visit Rich's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/rich-tehrani/>

Cable Company Customer Service: An Improbable Phrase

In her "Call Center/CRM" blog, Tracey Schelmetic writes:

I got my online version of the ASRNews and was interested to read about two cable giants: Charter and Comcast, and the fact that ASRNews tested their IVRs and found that the data customers feed in to the system is not used for CTI screen-pop purposes. Basically, Charter and Comcast are using their IVRS merely to annoy customers at the front end.

Said the newsletter, "This month we tested Charter Communications. No CTI. They gather ID information from the caller and then throw it away. Comcast does the same thing. These folks should either implement CTI or get rid of their IVR that is doing nothing other than irritating callers."

More high-quality customer service from the cable companies. How could it get any worse? They play a cardrum-shattering screech tone into customers' ears as payback for daring to try and get in touch with customer service?

You can find ASRNews' online newsletter at www.tmcnet.com/1830.1

Visit Tracey's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/call-center-crm/>

A Debut In The IP-PBX Game

In his VoIP & Gadgets blog, TMC CTO Tom Keating writes:

Aastra Telecom has entered the IP-PBX game with the AastraLink Pro 160. This is a very interesting move since Aastra Telecom is known for their IP phones used by various IP-PBXs, including many of the Asterisk-based solutions: trixbox, AsteriskNOW, Druid, PBX in a Flash, etc. With the AastraLink Pro 160 Aastra is now competing with IP-PBX vendors that purchase their phones. It will be interesting to see if some IP-PBX vendors, especially the Asterisk-based ones, move towards other IP phones such as Polycom. I suppose in the SMB space you're still more likely to go up against Avaya, Nortel, Toshiba, etc. than another Asterisk competitor. In any event, the AastraLink Pro Model 160 IP PBX is based on open standards (SIP) and is designed for the small business market targeting 25 users and under.

Visit Tom's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/tom-keating/>

Social Networking Needs More Socialization

In his "First Coffee" blog, TMCnet's David Sims writes:

First Coffee likes Louis Columbus's "very scientific approach" (see www.tmcnet.com/1831.1) to defining his own CRM predictions: "Putting Post-It notes of all predictions on the dartboard in the garage and sharing dart throws with my daughter at each." Seriously, Columbus has lots of good stuff, here's his #1:

"Trusted social networking on steroids begins an ascent to credibility. There's so much being written about social networking yet so little on quantifying trust and validating person's identities on these sites that 2008 will most likely be a year there will most likely be an intense focus on validating identities and affiliations. The Beacon fiasco scared the wits out of even progressive-thinking chief information officers; before social networking goes prime time the issue of trust and authenticity will have to be addressed."

Visit David's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/telecom-crm/>

Canadian Call Center Woes

In his "Making Contact" blog, TMCnet's Patrick Barnard writes:

Government officials in the various provinces of Canada which are highly reliant on the call center industry to keep the economy afloat are no doubt scrambling to try to come up with additional incentives and new strategies to keep U.S. companies from pulling their centers out.

A recent report from Datamonitor shows that many U.S. firms are now starting to pack up and relocate their Canada-based call center operations due to the increasing value of the U.S. dollar and the increasingly unfavorable exchange rate. Even call center outsourcing behemoth Convergys recently announced that it will be closing some of its facilities in Canada in the coming months. This is bad news for New Brunswick, which relies heavily on the call center industry for jobs and economic growth and is in the process of trying to become independent.

Visit Patrick's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/makingcontact/>

Your Car Keys Are In The Freezer

In his VoIP Authority blog, Internet Telephony's Greg Galitzine writes:

The UK's Daily Mail has a report (www.tmcnet.com/1832.1) on intelligent glasses that help wearers locate frequently mislaid items like car keys, cell phones, and the like.

The specs — developed by Japanese researchers under the tutelage of Professor Kuniyoshi at the University of Tokyo — feature a built in camera, display screen and computer brain which aid in finding misplaced objects.

Professor Kuniyoshi thinks these glasses might revolutionize the lives of people who suffer from memory problems.

Visit Greg's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/greg-galitzine/>

Rich Tehrani, Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.



Fusing Agents With Better Workflow And Processes For Better Customer Service

Jacada ([News - Alert](#)) is a provider of unified desktop and process optimization solutions for customer service operations. The company's solutions, Jacada Workspace and Jacada Fusion, are designed to simplify, automate and optimize a call center's work processes across disparate business systems, eliminating inefficiencies and boosting productivity. I recently got a chance to catch up with the company by chatting with Jacada's CEO Paul O'Callaghan.

RT: So how was business in 2007?

PO'C: 2007 was a record year for Jacada. In terms of results, we achieved record revenues of \$25.8 million for the year, in line with our annual guidance, and representing 25 percent growth over 2006. This growth was driven by a 57 percent increase in our call center business. On January 1, 2008, we sold our "Application Modernization," or legacy business, to Software AG for \$26 million in cash. We are now entirely focused on our call center solutions business, which grew to a record \$13.3 million from \$8.5 million in the fiscal year 2006. Our cash position is now approximately \$56 million.

From a new contract perspective, we had a very successful year. We signed new customer contracts in a number of different verticals, including telecommunications, public utility, financial and insurance services, retail, hospitality/gaming and government. We announced new contracts with O2 UK, Harrahs Entertainment, Station Casinos, Central Hudson Gas & Electric and Lillian Vernon. We also signed new contracts with other major customers we could not mention by name to include a major telecommunications provider in Canada, a premiere telecommunications provider in Eastern Europe, a significant contract with a major, brand name North American insurance company and another large North American public utility.

In 2007, we also signed reseller agreements with Avaya, Accenture ([News - Alert](#)) and IBM Global Business Services. The partners are currently engaged in promoting our solutions and assisting us in sales opportunities.

RT: How does it compare to where 2008 is headed?

PO'C: We are projecting 50 to 65 percent growth in 2007. At the end of 2007 our backlog, which represents booked business that we have not yet recognized, was \$14.7 million, representing a year-over-year increase of 76 percent. This speaks to the visibility and health of our future revenues. Based on the depth and quality of our sales pipeline, and our expectations that the majority of the backlog will be recognized in 2008, we have provided annual revenue guidance for 2008 of \$20 to \$22 million.

Most contact centers suffer from an overly complex customer service desktop. It negatively impacts both the efficiency and effectiveness of the customer service operation, and makes it very difficult for companies to enforce regulatory compliance and corporate policies.



➤ ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Common Myths About On-Demand Contact Center Solutions, Debunked

By Mae Kowalke, TMCnet Associate Editor

Many companies are considering setting up an on-demand contact center, and with good reason. Distributed workforces offer many advantages compared to on-premise operations. But, an on-demand contact center isn't for every company, and success relies on adopting best practices rather than jumping in with both feet before becoming educated. In its white paper, On-Demand Contact Center Solutions: The Six Myths, virtual call center solutions company Contactual addresses a half dozen common misperceptions surrounding on-demand contact centers.

[Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1833.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/1833.1)

Customer Suggestions Are The Best Form Of Leads For CRM

By Susan J. Campbell, TMCnet Contributing Editor

Customer relationship management applications can play a critical role in the enterprise as they can integrate pertinent information throughout the organization that enables different divisions to work together and to help drive the development of products and services that cater specifically to customer needs. While complicated systems are often put in place to strategically capture information from customers, other very basic methods are also used to get to the heart of the customers' needs.

[Read the article at www.tmcnet.com/1834.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/1834.1)

Workforce Optimization Helps The SMB Market Thrive

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

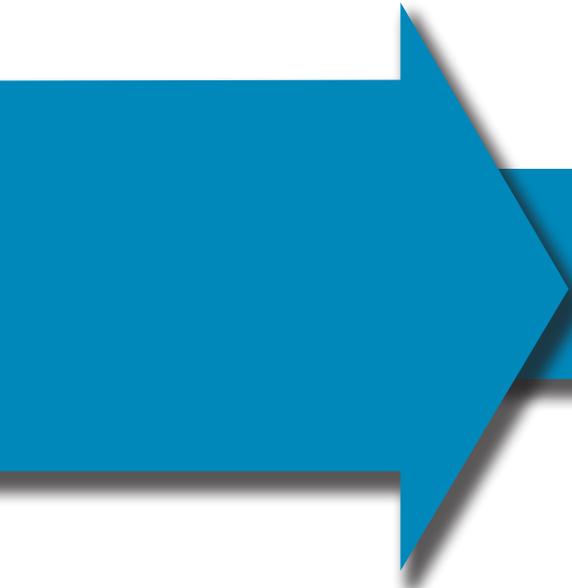
It's not a secret that the call center industry is a mature industry. That said, it doesn't mean there isn't strong growth potential. The systems and services that support the contact center industry are, after all, reliant on technology, and technology is ever-evolving. Workforce optimization solutions provider Verint Witness Actionable Solutions recently announced a solution that allows small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to gain the benefits enjoyed by larger companies when it comes to capturing customer intelligence and maximizing workforce performance.

[Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1835.1](http://www.tmcnet.com/1835.1)

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Quality Monitoring
eLearning
Analytics
Performance Management
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Witness Actionable Solutions



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As the leading workforce optimization solutions provider, Verint® Witness Actionable Solutions™ helps organizations master their toughest customer service problems across the enterprise, from contact centers to branch locations to back-office operations. For example, our Impact 360® Workforce Optimization solution helped a major communications provider **decrease agent attrition by 55 percent** and add **10,000 minutes of productivity** to its contact center per week.

For unified, analytics-driven, enterprise-enabled workforce optimization, visit verint.com or call 1-800-4VERINT.

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And our partners are just now beginning to contribute to our success. In the fourth quarter of 2007, partners made their first contributions represented by the new telecommunications customer win in Eastern Europe and the win with the major telecommunications company in Canada. One partner just recently delivered the first phase of one of the projects into production, on time and on budget with expanded scope. We expect to see the contribution from these partners to continue to grow as they increase their investment in Jacada-trained resources and continue to experience success.

RT: How does unifying the agent's desktop directly lead to improving KPIs?

PO'C: Most contact centers suffer from an overly complex customer service desktop. It negatively impacts both the efficiency and effectiveness of the customer service operation, and makes it very difficult for companies to enforce regulatory compliance and corporate policies. The systems are often so complicated and the processes are so complex that training takes too long, agents get frustrated and leave, handle times are too long and customer service and retention suffer. By simplifying and automating the customer service desktop, we can significantly improve the customer experience and the ability for the agent to add value back to the business.

RT: Which KPIs in particular?

PO'C: It's interesting. Most of our customers build their business case on improvements in efficiency metrics, but they are often really implementing the solution to improve effectiveness. For example, it is not unusual for our solution to deliver a reduction in average handle times of 20 percent, or reduce training times by as much as 50 percent. This translates to millions of dollars of savings for our customers, and typically a complete return on their investment in less than 12 months from deployment. These are the kind of numbers they need to gain budget approvals and the blessing of their CFO.

However, more times than not, the real objective is to improve effectiveness. For example, financial services and hospitality/gaming customers are looking to improving "share of wallet," or the ability to sell more reservations, upsell a new service — basically improve revenues. Utility customers are looking to improve customer service levels

Rich Tehrani, Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.

to compete in unregulated markets and gain approval for rate increases from the Public Service Commission. Telcos are all about customer satisfaction and retention... no one wants to be the next Sprint (*News - Alert*) and lose nearly 800,000 customers in three months, which was attributed in part to mediocre customer care.

RT: What specific improvements effected by unified desktops help bring about the ROI of your solutions?

PO'C: It's really about making the desktop do what the agent would expect it to do to support various call types. A lot has been written about a "single view" of the customer. What good is a "single view" if it means merely gathering and displaying thousands of pieces of customer data in 50 tabs on one desktop... with no context behind it? Our customers gain a significant competitive edge by deploying an intelligent view of customer data and interaction flow. If the agent is setting up a new customer, they want the data, screens and interaction flow required for setting up a new customer. If they are handling a claim or a support issue, they want to be stepped through that process logically. Most call centers handle more than 20 call types; some would say they handle hundreds. Providing an intelligent view of the data and interaction flow to the agent enables call centers to train more agents to take more call types, achieving that elusive concept of a "universal agent."

RT: Where will Jacada be in the next three years?

PO'C: I could not be more excited about the future for Jacada. For the past four years, we have been perfecting and advocating this notion of a unified desktop. Our growing list of Global 2000 customers and the support and recognition we are now receiving from some of the world's largest systems integrators tell us we are on the right track.

We will continue to innovate, and we will continue to listen to our customers. We are where we are today because we identified a significant pain point within our customers' contact center operations and delivered a leading, differentiated solution. Our customers continue to educate us on ways we can help them improve their customer service operations, and we will continue to deliver innovative solutions that solve real business problems.

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www.tmcnet.com/1739.1

ShoreTel Launches ShoreWare Contact Center 4.66



ShoreTel, a provider of Pure IP Unified Communications (News - Alert) solutions, has announced ShoreWare Contact Center 4.66. This suite of applications was designed to improve customer service while reducing the cost of deploying and maintaining high-performance inbound or outbound multimedia call center. ShoreWare Contact Center 4.66 is designed to support more simultaneous agents while offering several new features to enhance the customer experience. Such an execution will make it ideal for expanding mid-sized contact centers.

www.shoretel.com

www.tmcnet.com/1740.1

Aspect Brings Unified Communications To The Contact Center

Aspect's unified communications solutions bridge the divide between the contact center and the rest of the organization in a way that allows every person in an organization to become an integral part of the contact center in a manner that maximizes efficiency, customer service and sales levels. Contact center software with integrated workforce management has become an excellent way for organizations to manage their agents to achieve maximum efficiency. The irony is that generally speaking, the lower paid workers in an organization are in the call center. The more expensive "informal call center" agents have much higher compensation yet they aren't part of workforce management systems.

www.aspect.com

www.tmcnet.com/1741.1

Merced Systems (News - Alert) Intros New Service to Sales Best Practice And Benchmarking Study

Enterprise performance management solutions provider Merced Systems has launched the Merced Systems 2008

Service to Sales Best Practice and Benchmarking Study. The goal of the study is to assist organizations which are considering changing their customer service operations into blended service and sales operations. The study will examine current service to sales practices to help participants benchmark their transition strategies against those of other companies. Areas of focus include industry benchmarking and status of current service to sales transition programs; scope and challenges in making a transition to sales; and use of supporting tools and processes.

www.mercedsystems.com

www.tmcnet.com/1743.1

Microsoft (News - Alert) CRM Vendor Tectura Partners with SalesCentric

Tectura Corporation, a vendor of Microsoft Dynamics products, has chosen to partner with SalesCentric in offering Relationship Charts to their mid-market companies and large enterprise division CRM customers. Relationship Charts is an add-on to Microsoft Dynamics CRM allowing account managers to view the relationships within a prospect's organization, including vendors and suppliers, before the deal has passed. It integrates with Microsoft Dynamics CRM, meaning users already familiar with the CRM package will require minimal training.

www.tectura.com

www.tmcnet.com/1744.1

Salesforce.com (News - Alert) Named To Forbes Tech Growth List

Salesforce.com has, once again, been named to Forbes' "Fastest Growing Tech Companies" list. With annualized sales growth of 85 percent over the last five years, Salesforce.com ranked second only to Google (News - Alert) on the list of technology innovators. Selection criteria for Forbes' "25 Fastest Growing Tech Companies" include a minimum of \$25 million in sales over the last four quarters; 10 percent annual sales gains over the five previous years; profitability over the past 12 months; and 10 percent estimated annual profit growth for the next three to five years.

www.salesforce.com

www.tmcnet.com/1745.1

SAP AG, Intel (News - Alert) Announce Expansion of Partnership

Building upon its recently announced fast-start program for SAP Business All-in-One products, SAP AG has announced plans for an expansion of its partnership with Intel. SAP (News - Alert) and its long-term technology partner Intel intend to introduce a product offered on Intel Xeon-based systems via original equipment manufacturer and hardware system providers based on SUSE Linux Enterprise from Novell (News - Alert) and the database SAP MaxDB. SAP officials say the offering targets midsize companies in the manufacturing, service and trade industries and is intended to address the demands in these market segments for implementation, and products at "predictable costs."

www.sap.com and www.intel.com

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WE HAD INVITED A GROUP OF REPS TO THIS MEETING SO THEY COULD TELL US WHY ATTRITION IS SO HIGH IN THE CALL CENTER, BUT.....THEY HAVE ALL QUIT.



www.tmcnet.com/1746.1

SaaS Adoption 'Rising Steadily' Among SMBs, AMI Partners Finds

Among U.S. small businesses (1-99 employees) and medium businesses (100-999 employees), SaaS adoption is "rising steadily," according to the Access Markets International Partners report, 2008 U.S. Small and Medium Business Applications & Solutions Market Overview. The report found that 21 percent and 31 percent of SBs and MBs currently use SaaS products, which is double the percentage of adoption in 2004.

www.ami-partners.com

www.tmcnet.com/1747.1

Pegasystems (News - Alert) Announces New Versions of Business Process Management Solutions

Healthcare systems vendor Pegasystems, which sells business process management

products, has announced new versions of its Customer Process Manager solutions for healthcare. Built on Pegasystems' SmartBPM platform, the product uses customer processing capabilities that automate and optimize the service requests handled through a healthcare organization's contact center. Pegasystems' intent-driven processing is designed to anticipate both customer and service representative needs.

www.pegasystems.com

www.tmcnet.com/1748.1

Google Maps For CRM Tool

Sydney-based CRM Works, in collaboration with Web site development company iCatchIT, has announced SMaps, described by company officials as "a mapping tool that connects customer relationship management systems to Google Maps in real time." The product lets users use Google's mapping capabil-

ity with their CRM information such as contact details, price and order history to zoom in and make decisions. SMaps is billed as a product to "boost efficiency of mobile workers, helping them save time and cost." The Target List functionality provides "access to geographic information to sales managers and personnel who can then use that information to focus marketing and sales efforts," explains CRM Principal Consultant for Asia Pacific David Gill.

www.crmworks.com.au

www.tmcnet.com/1749.1

Holly Connects (News - Alert) and telisma Bring Speech Solutions Deeper Into Europe And India

In a bid to further expand its speech offering in Europe and India, Holly Connects, a provider of next-generation infrastructure for telephony and speech solutions to carriers, hosted providers and large enterprises,



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has announced a partnership with telisma, a speech recognition technologies provider. As per the partnership, the Holly Voice Platform will offer support for telisma's speech recognition software, teliSpeech. This will allow service providers to more easily create and deploy speech recognition-based services in CRM including natural language self-service or intelligent routing and automation of call centers.

www.holly-connects.com and www.telisma.com

www.tmcnet.com/1750.1

CRM Software: The Benefits Of Salesforce Automation Systems

CRM software is without a doubt crucial to the everyday functions of field sales professionals. With CRM software, field sales professionals are able to easily track and attain information about customers, leads and other necessary information. Offering field sales professionals the "back-office tools to keep them in front of their most valuable customers throughout the day," is sales force automation systems.

www.vendorguru.com

www.tmcnet.com/1752.1

Astute Solutions Patents Virtual Agent Technology



Astute Solutions has announced that the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) issued a Notice of Allowance for the company's RealDialog patent. The patent covers automated customer service via an intelligent virtual agent that is trained using customer-agent conversations. Human-assisted support has traditionally provided a higher quality of customer service than machine-assisted support, but it is far more expensive due to labor costs such as high turnover rates, training expenditures and rectifying human errors. To avoid these escalating expenditures, companies are opting to reduce costs

by implementing self-service solutions. Self-service, however, can go only so far in rectifying customer issues.

www.astutesolutions.com

www.tmcnet.com/1753.1

InfoCision's Taylor Named to Power 100 List

Akron, Ohio-based InfoCision Management Corporation announced recently that its chairman and founder, Gary Taylor ([News - Alert](#)), was named to the Power 100 list in the February issue of Inside Business Magazine that lists the 100 most powerful individuals in Northeast Ohio. Inside Business is a regional business publication serving Northeast Ohio, including the cities of Akron, Cleveland and Youngstown.

www.infocision.com

www.tmcnet.com/1754.1

Customer Care Institute Names New Fellow

The Customer Care Institute announced that it has named Dr. Frederick C. Van Bennekom a Fellow of the Institute. As a Fellow, Van Bennekom will develop new tools and techniques to assist customer care professionals with their customer satisfaction measurement programs. The Institute expects that Van Bennekom's experience as an author, lecturer and instructor on service management will add new dimensions to the group's work.

www.customercare.com

www.tmcnet.com/1755.1

Vonage (News - Alert) Plus SaaS CRM Equals High Functionality For SMBs

Software-as-a-Service CRM provider CRM ASP announced the availability of Vonage VoIP services fully integrated in the CRM platform. Available immediately, Vonage integration brings small businesses full integration with Free CRM and CRM ASP licensed products, providing one-click calling and automating phone dialing and outbound sales campaigns with Vonage. CRM ASP provides CRM solutions to over 75,000 companies and 90,000 subscribers. The announcement means that businesses can realize cost savings and reduce complexity by taking advantage of Vonage VoIP services integrated within the FreeCRM.

com product. According to the company, FreeCRM.com was the first on-demand CRM product to integrate the Skype ([News - Alert](#)) calling platform and is now the first to integrate Vonage VoIP services directly within the CRM system.

www.freecrm.com

www.tmcnet.com/1756.1

Five Tips For Picking A Virtual Call Center Solution

There are so many claims floating around about virtual call center on-demand contact center solutions (sometimes referred to as "on-demand" solutions) that it can be quite confusing to know what actually matters and how to pick a vendor that will live up to its promises. To cut through the confusion, Contactual ([News - Alert](#)) is offering a new white paper, On Demand Contact Center Technology: 5 Evaluation Criteria. According to Contactual, there are five main considerations associated with choosing a virtual call center solution. These are: software, hardware, planned maintenance, call center configuration changes, and integrated multi-media management.

www.contactual.com

www.tmcnet.com/1757.1

Five9 Becomes Corporate Member Of ATA

Hosted contact center services provider Five9 has become a corporate member of the American Teleservices Association (ATA). "We are pleased to welcome Five9 into our membership," said Tim Searcy, ATA CEO. He emphasized that its companies like Five9 whose growth and recent successes serve as evidence that their industry continues to thrive. Searcy said that Five9 will certainly benefit from participation in their education and networking events.

www.five9.com

www.tmcnet.com/1813.1

Really Simple Systems Debuts White Label CRM

Really Simple Systems, a British hosted CRM vendor, has announced general availability of their white label product, Really Simple OEM. Company officials say it allows marketing, sales organizations and traditional CRM resellers to



offer a “hosted CRM system with their own branding.” Really Simple OEM allows resellers to offer a hosted customer relationship management (CRM) system under their own brand, with their own contact and support details, personalized domain and at their own commercial terms. As well as addressing the technical and legal aspects of reselling hosted CRM, Really Simple Systems has “solved the commercial issues around reselling subscription services by billing the reseller monthly in arrears for usage,” company officials say, “leaving the reseller free to set their own end user commercial terms, which are normally a year’s subscription in advance.”

www.reallysimplesystems.com

www.tmcnet.com/1814.1

LiteScape and Spanlink (News - Alert) Announce Reseller Partnership

Unified communications applications provider LiteScape Technologies, Inc. announced recently that Spanlink Communications will resell LiteScape’s (News - Alert) Unified Communication (UC) applications. The partnership is expected to enable Spanlink to provide its customers with more powerful, agile solutions that deliver organizational competitiveness and agility. LiteScape’s UC applications are designed to extend the power of an organization’s enterprise infrastructure — directories, Web conferencing, CRM, office applications, e-mail, PBXs — to its phones and computers.

www.litescape.com
www.spanlink.com

www.tmcnet.com/1815.1

THE EXCHANGE Launches Call Center CRM Solution

E-commerce solutions provider The Exchange announced the launch of its new call center CRM system, based on its Officeweb back-office solution. The new system is now live with the first client, Click Group, a fast-growing, U.K.-based secured loans and life cover specialist. The Exchange’s Officeweb call center solution was launched as a market-wide proposition that can be tailored to the needs of any financial intermediary business or any other call center-orientated businesses that requires a CRM solution integrated to their telephony systems. The new system was developed in partnership with Callmedia, a UK technology provider of contact center and CTI (News - Alert) software.

www.click.co.uk

www.tmcnet.com/1817.1

PerSay Releases New Version Of Speaker Verification Platform

Tel Aviv-based advanced voice biometric solutions provider PerSay (News - Alert) has announced the official release of its Version 6.0 speaker verification platform. The new version features enhanced security to address the evolving challenges of delivering remote services via contact centers and the Internet. With a primary focus on security, the improved platform, based on existing .Net and Windows technology, underwent rigorous evaluation by third-party security experts to map potential vulnerabilities of every component and ensure the best possible protection against security threats and breaches.

www.persay.com

www.tmcnet.com/1816.1

Calabrio (News - Alert) Renames Its Unified Interaction Suite



Workforce optimization and unified desktop software provider Calabrio, Inc. has announced a new architectural direction for its software that will be built in an Enterprise 2.0 framework. According to the company, the new approach is expected to help improve business process integration by providing unified, flexible views of customer interaction, workforce optimization, performance management and analytics activities within the contact center. To reflect the new direction, the company has chosen Calabrio One as the new name of the suite of products formerly known as the Calabrio Unified Interaction Suite.

www.calabrio.com

www.tmcnet.com/1823.1

NEC’s Suite Of IPTV Solutions For Carriers; Partnership With Alcatel-Lucent (News - Alert)

NEC Corporation, a global provider of network solutions to enterprises, service providers and government agencies, is getting in on the IPTV market in a big way: The Japan-based, multina-

tional conglomerate, which has been a key player in the communications services market since the early 1900s, will soon be launching a full suite of end-to-end IPTV (News - Alert) solutions for service providers. As per a company press release, these IPTV solutions will cover the full gamut — from network architecture to delivery servers and household terminals. For these network solutions the company is utilizing a “Full Line Full Layer” approach, which will make it easier for service providers to guarantee the Quality of Service (QoS), Quality of Experience (QoE) and advanced security.

www.nec.com
www.alcatel-lucent.com

www.tmcnet.com/1824.1

Objectworld (News - Alert): Unified Communications Without VoIP

Objectworld Communications announced in March that its Unified Communications Server now enables businesses to reap the benefits of unified communications as an adjunct to existing PBX (News - Alert) systems. President and Chief Executive Officer of Objectworld, David Levy, said in a statement that a large number of businesses believe that they require a whole new VoIP system just to get unified communications. He noted that Objectworld UC Server Standard Edition makes unified communications widely available as Windows-based software that easily integrates with most mainstream PBX systems without needing a new PBX system, new phones, or VoIP.

www.objectworlds.com

www.tmcnet.com/1821.1

Digium (News - Alert) Widens Reach With New Version of Switchvox IP-PBX



Asterisk company Digium has released Switchvox SMB 3.5 and the AA60 Switchvox Appliance for small to mid-sized businesses. Switchvox is the most widely used communications system based on Asterisk (News - Alert), the open-source project headed by Digium and strengthened by the contributions



of hundreds of developers around the world. Switchvox SMB 3.5 introduces features and enhancements that larger companies require and the AA60 Switchvox (News - Alert) Appliance was designed specifically with the needs of small business in mind, highlighting the expanding market for the Switchvox product line.

www.digium.com

www.tmcnet.com/1825.1

Nortel (News - Alert) Government Solutions Delivers For USPS

The U.S. Postal Service has recently awarded a one-year, estimated six-million-dollar IT services contract extension to Nortel Government Solutions (News - Alert) to support the PostalOne! automated mail handling system. Chuck Saffell, CEO, Nortel Government Solutions, said Nortel is continuing to work with the USPS not only to keep PostalOne! running efficiently, but also to provide new applications and enhancements designed to help raise the level of customer service. This new contract follows a one-year, \$9.6 million extension in 2006. Nortel explains that the PostalOne! system helps integrate and optimize business mail handling, which is a nearly \$40 billion annual business for USPS. In addition, this system provides financial management data, as well as online access to tracking and status information for both the USPS (News - Alert) and its business customers.

www.nortel.com

www.tmcnet.com/1826.1

Power For Excellent Call Center Service

Customer satisfaction should be a key focus within each and every call center. As the key interaction point between the customer and the organization, the call center should be the first place the customer can be guaranteed an excellent experience. While some have fallen short of this goal, others are being noticed for it. Network Solutions (News - Alert) is the latest to be recognized for call center operation customer satisfaction excellence by J.D. Power and Associates' Certified Call Center Program. This is the third year in a row that Network Solutions has received this distinction, which acknowledges a strong commitment from its call center operations to provide "An Outstanding Customer Service Experience."

www.networksolutions.com

www.tmcnet.com/1827.1

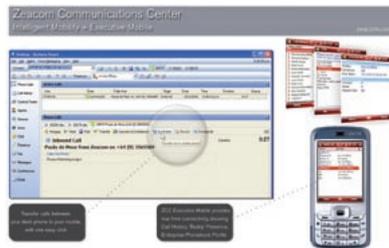
Research Focuses On Asian Contact Center Industry

The Indian contact center industry is one of the most competitive in the world, offering high-skilled talent, low wages, low overhead and an ample supply of educated individuals. The area still poses its own challenges and many are not exclusive just to this particular industry. According to callcentres.net's newly released 2008 Asian Contact Center Industry Benchmarking Report, the biggest challenges for the Indian contact center industry include employee attrition, recruitment, agent training and implementing new service channels. This report also indicates that Indian contact center executives are attempting to improve human resource management results by offering financial incentives, reward and recognition programs, as well as better career planning for agents. Currently, average tenure for an Indian contact center agent is lowest in the region at nine months.

www.callcentres.net

www.tmcnet.com/1822.1

Zeacom (News - Alert) Communications Center 5.0 Offers New Applications For Mobile UC



Zeacom, which offers unified communications solutions for the SMB market, recently demonstrated the new capabilities of its Communications Center 5.0 platform during VoiceCon Orlando 2008. This latest version of the company's flagship UC product offers voice conferencing and also brings unified communications from the desktop to mobile devices. Its conferencing capability lets organizers set up voice conferences quickly and easily, without the need to adhere to rigorous "schedules" imposed by third-party conferencing services. Conferences can be established "on the fly" for as many as 64 parties – plus it is a lot easier to postpone or

re-schedule conferences, compared to using a third-party service. In addition, organizers have greater control over call volume and meeting participation, including automatic Caller Line Identification (CLI) based log-in, arrival and termination notifications.

www.zeacom.com

www.tmcnet.com/1828.1

Non-Profit Organizations Turning To MPower For CRM

Not-for-profit organizations are recognizing the benefits of customer relationship management solutions. According to MPower, more than 200 charitable organizations, as well as consulting firms and professionals working in the philanthropic community, have downloaded MPower. This CRM software is positioned as the most open, flexible and powerful solution for non-profits since its availability as an open source offering without licensing fees on March 11. In the first week following MPower's move to an open source model, the company's software has been downloaded by a broad spectrum of non-profits and consultancies that serve these organizations. This includes some of the nation's 50 largest non-profits as well as SMBs, U.S. and international groups focused on education, broadcasting, seniors, environmental issues and the arts.

www.mpower.com

www.tmcnet.com/1829.1

Tech Data (News - Alert) Unveils IP Communications Services For SMBs

Tech Data Corporation has unveiled a comprehensive suite of IP communications services resellers can use to deliver onsite or hosted voice and data connectivity to small-to-midsized businesses (SMBs). This suite of IP communications services will enable Tech Data customers to more easily generate recurring revenue by including these services with their networking and telephony solution sales. Tech Data provides resellers with access to an array of IP communications services from Cbeyond (News - Alert) Inc., Televisions Inc. and XO Communications. These services include converged network connectivity for voice and data systems and hosted and managed telephony solutions that are ideal for SMBs seeking to adopt VoIP but unable to make the investment necessary to support their own solution.

www.techdata.com

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Customer Service Suffering For Certain Contact Centers

Customer service departments often get a bad rap. While most are put in place to actually improve the customer experience, many fail to do so by ignoring processes or taking a complacent approach to customer deliverables. For those that really focus on improving the overall customer experience, the standards continue to rise as consumers become more demanding.



In a recent Ouch Point study from Opinion Research Corporation, one in five U.S. respondents, or 20 percent, cited hard-to-understand representatives with thick accents as their biggest frustration in dealing with customer service departments. Coming in at a close second (17 percent) was the length of time it takes to get through to a representative.

“Customer service representatives are the ‘face’ of any service organization, and therefore need to be understood by their customers,” said Linda G. Shea, Senior Vice President and Global Managing Director of Customer Strategies at Opinion Research Corporation.

“Issues such as the time it takes to reach a representative, a lack of familiarity with the company’s products and services, and being transferred to the wrong person or department, when not identified and remedied, can cause significant damage to a company’s reputation and future business,” she added.

The study also found that 14 percent cited frustration with representatives who are not knowledgeable about their organization’s products, services or processes. Another 13 percent were frustrated with being transferred to the wrong person or the wrong department.

Another nine percent of respondents were frustrated with representatives who promise to follow through and don’t, while eight percent were frustrated over representatives who are not empowered to handle a situation. Another seven percent cited agents who did not understand the situation and three percent were frustrated with agents who preferred to debate the situation.

Issues such as the time it takes to reach a representative, a lack of familiarity with the company’s products and services, and being transferred to the wrong person or department can cause significant damage to a company’s reputation and future business.

ORC’s “Ouch Point” series is a monthly survey examining tolerance thresholds in a variety of common scenarios facing Americans in both their professional and personal lives every day.

Survey questions are based on ORC’s extensive research experience in the areas of customer service and strategies, market planning and development, corporate branding and reputation and employee engagement.

Information such as that captured in the ORC survey are imperative for customer service companies as a comprehensive focus on these areas can lead to great improvement in their customer service deliverables. Making these elements a priority helps to ensure better customer satisfaction and thus, better customer loyalty.

Reps who are hard to understand because of a thick accent	20%
Length of time to reach a representative	17%
Reps who are not knowledgeable about their organization’s products/services/process	14%
Being transferred to the wrong person or the wrong department	13%
Reps who promise to follow through and don’t	9%
Reps who are not empowered to handle a situation	8%
Reps who don’t understand your situation	7%
Reps who want to debate your situation	3%

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Newton's Third Law of Customer Service E-Mails



Newton's Third Law of Physics, as you well know, states that for every e-mail, there is an equal and opposite e-mail. And we live in the parallel universe where we get those equal and opposite e-mails.

We also get to hear what's really on politicians' minds when they're talking, we know how often girls actually wash their hair and we always get good parking places in midtown Manhattan. It's nice, yeah, but we wish we could get a decent cup of coffee from the Starbucks here, because Newton's Fourth Law of Physics holds that for every cup of good coffee, there is an equal and opposite cup of abject swill.

We know you want to provide good customer service via e-mail, so you tell customers when they can expect a response — and you keep to that schedule. You actually respond when you say you will. This is because you know that response time depends a great deal on how quickly your automated routing gets the appropriate e-mail to the appropriate respondent in your organization.

You never write in all caps, you have a punchy, relevant subject line, and you even include the recipient's name in the response. Your agents have access to all the customer information they need to write an intelligent, useful response, they understand what the customer is talking about and they have the reporting and analysis capability to track trends.

You've analyzed the most common customer queries and have developed responses with highly effective habits. You've done such a good job with your FAQ list that your agents are only getting the complicated questions, but because you've prepped your agents so well, they don't have any trouble.

Remember that confirmation e-mail you sent last week to Elmer Schlumpkin of Rusty Gulch, New Jersey, confirming shipment of his order of 12 anvils? My, it was perfect:

From: Acme Anvils

To: Elmer Schlumpkin

Subject line: Your March 13 Order Has Shipped.

Body: Thank you for ordering with Acme Anvils. We'd like to let you know that your order has shipped, and should be at your home within five business days.

Tracking number: ES74759AM

To follow the progress of your order, click the following link: www.acmeanvils/shipping/c7tteltrack/eschlumpkin/5day.com

Sincerely,

Acme Anvils Customer Service

service@acmeanvils.com

It wasn't mistaken for spam, it presented your company well and it kept Elmer from calling in. Your company name appeared clearly in the return field, the subject line was clearly related to Elmer's specific transaction and the most important information appeared first in the body of the e-mail.

It provided a tracking number, even though you and I know nobody ever actually uses them, just like nobody ever uses fire extinguishers, but they're comforting to have around. It deep-linked to a specific place in the site instead of to the general page, was snappy, brisk and without a wasted word — Elmer was able to glance over it and see exactly what it was in 2.3 seconds.

Well done. Frame that e-mail and use it as a textbook. Want to see the one we got here — three and a half weeks later?

From: tammy barkin y77thgAF@comstock.net.tv

To: schlump571@yahoohotgmail.com

Subject line: Imprtant information for YOU!

Body: hello and THANK YOU SO MUCH for your recint transaction with our company XOXOXOXO!!!!

We want to take this opportunity to inform you that we would like to tell you how much we appreciate your business, and that we strive too provide the best customer service possible. If your most recently communication email which you sent to us containteda question PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE for the answer on the faq page

Let us tell you a little about the compnay- we have been in business sine 2008 and we really hope to give you the best possible anvils and the best customer servicee anywhere!!!! We use only the finest metal and productin techniques, and we offer a full guarantee that youll really like our products.

YOUR BUSINESS IS VERY IMPORTANT TO US, and pleasecheck the site to see when you can expect your order to be sent out. please check your account on the site to see when it is expected to arrive depending on the shipping option you checked if you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to call us at 1-800-555-1212.

THANK YOU!!!!

The Acme Anvils Team

Whew! What an absolutely pristine beauty! It manages to get pretty much everything wrong. Shall we count the ways?

You have no clue who it's from. The company name, Acme Anvils, does not appear either in the return name or e-mail, all that appears is the customer service rep's name — why should the customer have any clue who that is? — and the return domain of the outsourced customer service provider.

The recipient's name does not appear in the recipient line. Okay, it's a bit tougher to get that right, but it's great if you do.

The subject line is a mess. Besides the grammatical improprieties — and let me tell you, few things drop a company's image faster than sloppy



grammar. Do yourself a favor, the next time you're in McDonald's hire a couple of the English majors working in the back to write your canned e-mails. Not only that, it could just as easily have been sent by someone wanting Elmer to buy cheap ViJaGGArA, provide his personal banking numbers for a Nigerian Deputy Undersecretary For Diamond Mining & Ice Cream or show him how to make \$100,000 a year watching TV for Facebook (*News - Alert*).

Let's talk about the body. Roll up your sleeves here:

Spelling mistakes. So easy to correct, so hard to overcome.

No important information is conveyed. Elmer's life or knowledge of the status of his transaction is improved not a whit upon receipt of this e-mail.

Much of Elmer's time is wasted up top. He does not want to be thanked beyond a quick, professional "Thank you for ordering with Acme Anvils." He does not care how long the company has been in business, he wants to know when he's going to see his anvils on his front porch.

A wise man once said there are probably six or seven times in one's life when using an exclamation point is appropriate. He was correct. He might have also added Miss Manners' dictum that no respectable job requires one to simulate emotions or add 11-year-old girl flourishes to e-mails.

There is no specific information provided to Elmer for checking the status of his order, no confirmation of the status of his shipment, only an aloof, airy "check the site."

The only actionable information in the entire e-mail, assuming Elmer didn't drown in the swamp on his way to it, is a phone number at the end. As the only reason for the existence of customer service e-mails at all is to prevent people from calling in, the only possible effect this e-mail can have is to negate any cost benefit the company might have received.

Elmer might get his anvils. He might get them on time. He might get twelve baskets of feathers for all he knows from this e-mail.

Over here we'll get a pound of feathers, but at least that's not as heavy as a pound of iron. Not here, anyway.

Visit David Sim's *First Coffee* blog on TMCnet at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/telecom-crm/>

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"Build Customers for LifeSM"



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- Real case studies on loyalty management
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CRM Is NOT “One Size Fits All”



CDC Software ([News - Alert](#)) calls itself a “customer-driven company,” and its product line reflects this. They offer solutions that help companies “understand, attract and keep valuable customers,” which, of course, is the goal of business (or should be, anyway).

CDC (www.cdcsoftware.com) has made a number of acquisitions in the past several years, most notably CRM solutions provider Saratoga Systems in April 2007.

I recently got a chance to speak with Jason Rushforth, Global Vice President of Financial Services for CDC Software about the direction the company is headed in the future.

RT: What trends are driving the financial services industry right now?

JR: Current economic conditions are having a major impact on the financial services industry. Financial services firms are among those hardest hit by the sub-prime mortgage collapse. Many have suffered massive write-downs, and in its wake they now have to grapple with extremely volatile markets and widespread economic uncertainty. This is pushing them toward more conservative choices as well as staff and budget cuts. At the same time, their client bases are becoming increasingly sophisticated and demanding, pushing them toward innovation and higher service standards. It's an interesting combination of forces, driving them to do more with less.

RT: How are financial services firms responding to this situation?

JR: If they're going to deliver more innovation and better service while dealing with cutbacks and write-downs, financial services firms have no choice but to become more efficient. They're looking at their processes to identify areas that they can streamline and get more accomplished efficiently and cost-effectively.

Financial firms are also aware that economic uncertainty and negative headlines can erode their customer base if they're not careful, so they're focused on customer retention. This ties into their drive for cost-effectiveness because it costs less to retain existing clients and sell additional products and services to them than to acquire new customers.

RT: How can technology support these efforts?

JR: Current conditions are inspiring a renewed interest among financial services firms in custom-

er relationship management (CRM) solutions because CRM supports both the cost-efficiency and customer relationship elements of their strategies for dealing with the downturn. CRM involves a lot of automation and process-streamlining around marketing, sales and service activities, so it helps cut costs and accelerate activities, increasing productivity. At the same time, it helps financial services firms get closer to their customers and understand them better, uncovering cross-selling and upselling opportunities.

RT: What are financial services firms looking for today in a CRM system?

JR: They know exactly what they don't want: massive, amorphous systems that require months of costly customization. Many are turning to industry-tailored CRM applications that better reflect their business processes and data models right out of the box, allowing for a faster, less complex implementation. There are many discrete lines of business within financial services and they all have different needs, so firms can really benefit from CRM solutions tailored to each business line, especially if they can work together on the same platform. The top overall need is flexibility, because financial firms know that change is constant.

RT: What benefits are financial services firms deriving from industry-tailored CRM?

JR: Lower total cost of ownership and faster, easier implementation are two top benefits, but a better overall business fit is also very important. Financial services is a complex industry and firms don't want to change their business processes to fit a generic CRM system. When they find a system built with a real underlying comprehension of their industry, they see the difference immediately. This isn't just a benefit in terms of customization requirements but also in user adoption, which is critical to CRM success. Users take much more easily to a system that closely fits their environment and needs.

RT: What impact is globalization having on financial services firms in their CRM deployments?

JR: Many financial services firms operate

globally and so do their customers. This means firms can't afford to have silos of information dispersed across the globe; they need a unified global view of customers, relationships and client interactions. This holistic view can provide insight into opportunities and relationships in other regions they can capitalize on — for example, a European customer with U.S. operations not currently serviced by the firm. The challenge is to mix localization with globalization, supporting different languages, currencies, business practices, regulations and nuances while maintaining global unity and visibility. But it is achievable with a flexible system.

RT: What role can CRM play in helping financial services firms stay competitive?

JR: Differentiation is a growing challenge in the financial services industry because financial products and services are increasingly commoditized. Even if firms come up with an innovative investment strategy or product, it is soon copied by competitors. Accordingly, we've seen a lot of financial services firms recognizing the customer experience as a better avenue for differentiation: crafting a superior, consistent and value-added experience is harder to replicate and builds stronger client relationships — inspiring loyalty and referrals. To support this experience and ensure it is consistently executed across the board, they're using CRM as the underlying “experience architecture.”

RT: How is the increasing use of mobile devices impacting financial services firms?

JR: Customers are using mobile devices so financial services firms have to keep pace. But the mobility challenge extends beyond using these devices to facilitate communication or even for mobile consumer banking. Laptops, cell phones, BlackBerry ([News - Alert](#)) devices and other mobile devices are breaking down the barriers that define where business is done. Banking doesn't have to take place at the bank anymore. So today's financial users need anytime, anywhere access to their CRM data on mobile devices to obtain a full customer view and provide informed, consistent service no matter where the client wants to conduct business.

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TMCnet Editorial Director Greg Galitzine speaks with Jim Cossetta, Co-Founder, President and CEO of 4What Interactive about today's customizable, on-demand training tools for smoothing the transition to IP Communications.

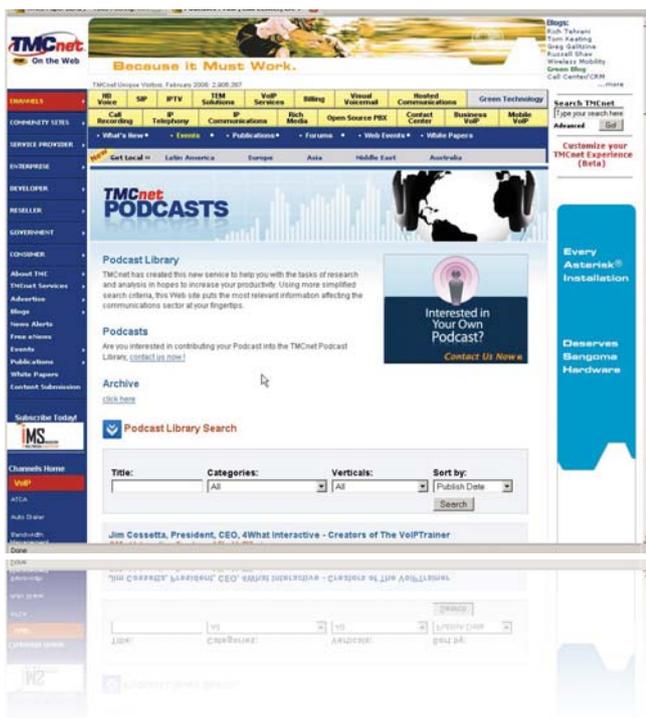


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Identifying, Knowing & Retaining Your Customers: The “Prosumer”

Today’s consumer, a/k/a the Global Professional Consumer, or Prosumer, might rightly be regarded as fickle; some may even say disloyal.

Coined by futurist author Alvin Toffler in his 1991 book *Third Wave*, the term Prosumer refers to a 22- to 42-year-old consumer activist. Specifically, a Prosumer is a consumer who becomes involved in the design and manufacture of products and services so they can be made to individual specification. This term reveals that consumers are no longer a passive market upon which industry can dump consumer goods, but a viable part of the creative process. This is also called “mass customization,” which means that everyone is, in effect, a member of a niche market. Such a view is encouraged by Internet e-commerce, which essentially “cuts out the middleman” between maker and buyer.

Global prosumers are best defined as the 25 to 28 percent of consumers who regularly make or break products and brands, or create market shifts. The prosumer thinks differently than Baby Boomers when making buying decisions — research shows it takes only a small number, approximately two to three percent of global prosumers, to create a new trend worldwide and generate the marketing buzz that can make your commercial effort a boom or a bust.

Prosumerism is powered by connectivity and interactivity and, in turn, drives developments to extend both.¹ In 1996, 50 million people worldwide were digitally connected. A decade later, the number of digitally-connected people had grown to 1.2 billion. Given this level of growth, it is quite likely that by early next decade, one out of every three people on earth — well over 2 billion individuals — will be globally connected.²

A Loyal Prosumer?

Prosumers revel in options, and want to feel they are doing the smart thing. What’s smart depends on the context and the individual, but typically means being well informed, knowing what’s available and checking out

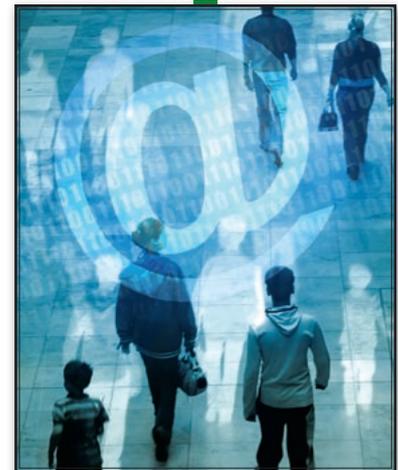
the opinions of others.³ When it comes to consumption, prosumers regard low prices as smart, unless they’re trumped by better value for a higher price, where value includes elements such as customer service, design and brand.⁴ This makes the prosumer — your customer — choosy and fickle.

The old mantra of “earn a quick buck and earn a quick profit” no longer rings true. Prosumers’ loyalty has more to do with a company’s reputation, reliability and relationships than it does with marketing campaigns and advertising slogans.

Business Implications Of The Prosumer

The prosumer’s rise to power in the areas of pricing and customer services is a direct result of connectivity. In the area of customer service, this connectivity results in heightened expectations regarding the quality and time frame associated with customer-to-vendor contact.⁵ An instant is good, minutes are acceptable; maybe even hours, but a day just won’t cut it with today’s prosumers.

There is also an ever-expanding trend to view shopping not merely as the satisfaction of a consumer’s “needs,” but also as recreation and entertainment.⁶ From this recreational prosumer’s viewpoint, the need to tailor and custom-



ize the offering, price and value to each consumer is even more apparent. But simply offering more choices is not the entire equation; indeed, too much choice will make your prosumer unhappy.⁷

The Prosumer And The Communications Market

The prosumer in the communications market is highly likely to embrace broadband and new digital services (e.g., digital video). They are likely to buy a bundle of services from one company, but are also very likely to switch from one provider to another to get the best service or offer. Incumbent as well as emerging services providers should make the prosumer a segment of high focus, due to the prosumer’s willingness to switch providers as well as the high average revenue per customer.⁸

The Prosumer Demands A New Buying Experience

To reach prosumers in the communications market and win their business, service providers need to employ a new set of customer ac-

Traits of the prosumer	Time Moves Faster
	Selects on Information
	Seeks Digital Processes
	Place and Distance Don’t Matter
	Avoid Bricks and Mortar
	Uses the Web for Communication



quisition strategies. These strategies must work to increase and enhance the buying options the prosumer receives from the service provider including, but not limited to, more service and pricing options and an added number of customer interaction options (e.g., call center, Web self-care, retail site, etc.) Further, these strategies must support the fast and high quality service delivery requirements of the prosumer. To put it simply, the prosumer demands that service providers deliver an entirely new buying experience centered on customer personalization and buying convenience.

To deliver this new buying experience, a service provider should embrace five distinct offer management and customer acquisition strategies:

Creative offer management. Service providers who wish to address the prosumer segment should embrace an enterprise product catalog (ECP) strategy that weaves the product catalogs of customer relationship management (CRM), supply chain management (SCM), billing systems other similar operations systems into a single product catalog focused on facilitating offer and bundle design creativity as well as the rapid introduction of new service and bundle options.

Partner relationship management. The prosumer demands a service bundle with a rich mix of service options. To deliver this bundled experience, a service provider may need to integrate products and services provided by a host of business partners. For example, the launch of a broadband bundle with a new service capability based on mobile gaming technology may require the integration and synchronization of networks and ordering between a service provider and its gaming partner. This calls for service providers to employ partner relationship management systems and processes where multiple partners and supply chains can be integrated in the product development lifecycle and fulfillment lifecycle in order for a service provider to deliver the bundled experience.

Customer-centric sales experience. A prosumer's decision to select a particular service provider is dominated by intangibles and not driven by technology alone. These intangible factors, which include convenience and personalized attention, work in combination to form an overall customer experience. Further, customers are increasingly impulsive and self-centered, willing to switch providers on a whim. Service providers must employ systems and processes designed to give customers immediate attention and satisfy their quick decision making, while simultaneously delivering customer personaliza-

tion. This calls for service providers to use new business models to maximize value through the customer service lifecycle.

Multichannel customer interactions. To address the customer-centricity and personalization demanded by the prosumer, service providers must expand as well as enhance their multichannel sales and support capabilities. Prosumers want access to their account and to sales anytime, anywhere, anyhow. Service providers must embrace selling through multiple channels that can be tailored to support the unique experience the prosumer expects at each channel including call center, retail site, e-commerce site and resellers.

Bundled order management. Time is of the essence to the prosumer. Bundle orders must be delivered with full awareness of the prosumer's aggressive time expectations. To meet these expectations, service providers must employ an order management solution that tightly orchestrates the fulfillment of multi-level, multi-line item service orders for bundled services across multiple fulfillment points that reside inside and outside the service provider's enterprise.

Prosumers represent one of the faster growing and highest value segments in today's communications market. By focusing on implementing four distinct offer management and customer acquisition strategies, a service provider can build the unique buying experience that addresses the characteristics of today's prosumer. The result will be a service provider who is able to gain a considerable share of this lucrative market segment.

Sterling Commerce (News - Alert) (www.sterlingcommerce.com) has provided business process solutions to FORTUNE 500 companies and the world's largest banks for over 30 years. Formerly a division of Sterling Software, Sterling Commerce became an independent corporation through an initial public offering in March 1996. SBC Communications acquired Sterling

Commerce in March 2000. With the merger of AT&T Corp. and SBC Communications Inc. in November 2005, Sterling Commerce became a subsidiary of AT&T Inc.

- 1 *Twelve Key Prosumer Trends, Prosumer Pulse® (News - Alert) 2004 - Anticipating Consumer Demands, Euro RSCG Worldwide.*
- 2 *http://www.gleach.com/globstats/evol.html.*
- 3 *Twelve Key Prosumer Trends, Prosumer Pulse® 2004 - Anticipating Consumer Demands, Euro RSCG Worldwide.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Euro RSCG Worldwide, Two Imperatives emerge as keys to successful marketing, October 18, 2001.*
- 6 *Consumer Insights Study of the Recreational Shopper, Their Demographics, Their Shopping Choices and Their Motivations to Shop, Recreational Shopping Report, 2006.*
- 7 *Twelve Key Prosumer Trends, Prosumer Pulse® 2004 - Anticipating Consumer Demands, Euro RSCG Worldwide.*
- 8 *Ibid.*

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Murder At The SMB: The CRM Autopsy Report

The sheet is pulled back from the corpse on the gurney in the examination room. The CEO's stomach clamps up. "It's... it's him," he says as his knees buckle. "It's our CRM." His secretary helps him to a chair.

"Is there an autopsy report?" the CEO croaks. "Can you figure out who did it?"

The pathologist stubs out his cigarette and glances at the clipboard in his hand. "There are a few things I picked up. Now might be a good time to go over them." He nods to the detective sitting in the room, who flips open a notepad.

"Hope you don't mind the lieutenant sitting in," the doctor says. "Figured we'd save ourselves some time."

"No, no. Lieutenant." The CEO nods to the detective, who nods back. "Anything to find the murderer. Well. Let's have it. What was the cause of death?"

"I'll start from the beginning," the doctor says. "And the officer might be able to fill in some of the missing pieces." The detective poises his pen over the notepad.

"First off, it looks to me like your firm was ignoring the big picture, and nobody there really had much of a clue how CRM fit in the overall business strategy," the doctor says. "In my line of work I see a lot of D.O.A. CRM projects, and nineteen times out of twenty, the company hasn't a clue what their competitive advantage over their competition is. They bring in CRM to try to turbo-charge a car with no steering wheel. Spend all that money,

that time training people, rejigging the company's organizational structure, you wouldn't believe some of the things I've seen. Fistfights."

The CEO nods. "Our IT VP always hated the guy. I guess he had a pretty good motive."

**The doctor smiled.
"CRM usually gets
fobbed off on IT even
though he's not an IT
project, is he? And yes,
it does play havoc with
the IT department.
He doesn't get many
Christmas cards from
IT. But I rarely see CRM
killed by IT."**

The doctor smiles. "That's usually the case. CRM usually gets fobbed off on IT even though he's not an IT project, is he? And yes, it does play havoc with the IT department. He doesn't get many Christmas cards from IT. But I rarely see CRM killed by IT."



The CEO swallows. "Go on."

"Not to speak ill of the dead," the doctor continues, lighting another cigarette which he uses to point at the body under the sheet, "but CRM here wasn't the most likeable guy. When I opened him up I found him pretty inflexible. Had a hard time growing with your company and your customers, if I don't miss my guess. When you saw areas that needed more attention from him he wasn't always able to scale to that, was he?"

The secretary speaks up for the first time. "No, he wasn't. We got him because he worked really well for our partners, but they're a lot bigger, and... well, maybe he wasn't exactly what we needed. We changed as a company, we evolved, but he... didn't."

The doctor nods. The detective in the back is writing furiously.

"So he wasn't the most popular guy at the company. Sales people were feeling constrained, and for what he was costing the company he wasn't seen as pulling his weight, was he?"

"Our CFO really, really hated the guy," the CEO says. "Better ask him where he was on the night of August 12th."

The doctor snorts. "CFOs don't kill CRM



near as often as other profiled suspects. May I continue?" The CEO spreads his arms as if to say the floor is yours.

"So we have a guy who was pretty expensive and not what everybody wanted. What happened, and correct me if I'm wrong here, is that after a while, employees thought this guy's just too hard to work with. Nobody used him, and they'd cross over to the other side of the corridor when they saw him coming. And can you blame them? He didn't come with his own training modules or easy to follow icons and windows. He was pretty difficult. Not the first guy picked for softball at the company picnic."

"There's something else that needs to be said here," the secretary says again. The CEO shoots her a you-better-be-careful look. "The system he replaced was pretty popular among the employees. We got rid of a comfortable, easy to use, familiar tool for... for..."

"Amanda," the CEO says. "If you have something to confess you'd better come clean."

"No," the doctor says, laying an avuncular hand on the secretary's shoulder. "We're not saying Amanda, or too many other people, warmed up to CRM. But she didn't kill him."

"Let's focus a bit on the training," the detective says. All heads turn his direction. "Were the employees given enough training so they felt comfortable working with the guy? We're talking about going from a tricycle to a Harley-Davidson when you hired him, was the company prepared in advance for that?"

"I told HR to get on it," the CEO explodes angrily. "They kept saying 'don't worry about it, we've got it all under control,' I bet they wanted him out of the way."

"Oh they did," the detective says. "But not enough to kill him. Sure he was costly and time-consuming, yours isn't the biggest operation in the world and he was eating a lot of resources, but the

training officer did her best, given what she had to work with. But one thing I saw during the autopsy was that in your company, the actual fact is that only a few select teams and people were ever really fully introduced to him."

"I'll tell you what I saw when I had him opened up on my table: Nothing. That's right. Bupkis. No consensual buy-in among senior management. I couldn't find more than a handful of employees who were ever explained the reason for CRM, shown how the guy worked or told of the benefits you expected from him."

"Well... I... you can't stop what everyone's doing," the CEO says. "The rollout was gradual."

"A bit too gradual, if you ask me," the doctor says, pointing with his cigarette at the CEO. "I'll tell you what I saw when I had him opened up on my table: Nothing. That's right. Bupkis. No consensual buy-in among senior management. I couldn't find more than a handful of employees who were ever explained the reason for CRM, shown how the guy worked or told of the benefits you expected from him. I didn't find a single customer service rep in the detailed plans, and I found a strong lack of senior, C-level support."

"It's the CIO," the CEO says, sagging back in his chair. "He's always hated everything I've done. He was looking for a way to get back at me. I can't believe he'd stoop to this."

"He didn't," the detective says. "Let's discuss CRM's business requirements, shall we? There aren't two CRMs the same in the world. How'd you hire this guy?"

"I... he came well-recommended. He had lots of features, and people we'd talked to had good experiences working with him," the CEO says.

The doctor shoots questions at the CEO rapid-fire, stepping closer and jabbing with the cigarette each time. "Did you ever interview him on your particular corporate culture before hiring him? Ever examine his product history? Define your requirements? Audition other CRMs? Fit him in your budget instead of fitting your budget around him? Work him into your corporate structure instead of letting him dictate structure? Did you ever think," asks the doctor, leaning into the CEO's face by now, "that maybe he just wasn't right for your company from the start? That maybe he belonged in a bigger firm with more resources, somewhere they knew how to use him?"

"All right, all right, I confess! Yes, I killed him! I killed him," the CEO bursts out, then collapses in the chair, sobbing. "I killed him."

The detective whips out a pair of handcuffs and snaps them on. The secretary jumps to her feet. "Larry, how... how could you?"

"Don't get too worked up," the doctor says. "That's how it goes in most of the autopsies I run on CRMs here. It's the CEO. Ultimately it's his baby to kill or nourish."

"So what was the cause of death?" she asks, whirling around to face the doctor. The CEO is bundled from the room, still blubbing about how nice and shiny CRM looked out of the box. The doctor waits until he's gone and the door closes.

"That's easy," he says, smiling. "Starvation and atrophy. Happens all the time."



The Power Of SaaS: VoIP Call Centers For A Fraction Of The Cost



The software as a service (SaaS) trend is revolutionizing the call center industry, as companies of all sizes are now discovering the advantages of going with hosted versus on-premise solutions. With SaaS for the call center, applications such as IVR, ACD, predictive dialing, workforce management and CRM are hosted on a shared platform in a data center and delivered to the agents via the Internet or dedicated network. Because they are completely Web-based, these solutions are quick and easy to deploy – and furthermore require very little up front investment, as there is usually no additional equipment needed. Because the software is delivered over the Internet “as a service,” the traditional software licensing model is replaced with a “subscription” model, or “leasing” model where the software is “rented” based on the amount of time it is used, multiplied by the number of seats. This “pay-as-you-go” model makes today’s SaaS solutions analogous to a utility: You pay for only the amount you use.

Today, there are even affordable Web-based call center solutions geared for small businesses with under 12 agents. Despite their low cost, these solutions don’t skimp on features: They offer many of the same capabilities found in much larger, much more expensive on-premise enterprise systems. Many small companies are already having great success with these hosted solutions and are realizing ROI in a very short time frame.

If you’re running a growing small business and you’re thinking about setting up your own in-house VoIP call center to better serve your customers, gain new efficiencies and improve the bottom line, you should definitely consider the SaaS model to meet your call center software needs. The first and most important step is to determine whether the SaaS model is the right fit — for example, some SaaS solutions are better suited to out-bound call or contact centers, where as others are geared for inbound or blended service.

Let’s take a closer look at the advantages today’s SaaS solutions for the call center bring.

Lower Up-Front Costs

Generally speaking, the biggest factor driving adoption of SaaS is lower up-front cost. Companies which decide to go with SaaS for their contact center save initially by avoiding the need to shell out capital for on-premise equipment and installation services. In fact, with most of today’s hosted solutions, all you really need to launch a new VoIP call center is a room full of PCs, each with its own high speed Internet connection, some headsets, the agents, and that’s about it!

Also, SaaS enables companies to avoid having to pay for the licensing of new software in a lump sum -- rather, they simply lease the software on a subscription or “pay-as-you-go” basis. Not only is this pricing model more economical, it’s easier to predict and manage, and affords simplified financial reporting: Rather than paying out chunks of capital all at once for upgrades or replacements of on-premise systems, call centers now have the ability to include the cost of their SaaS service as a recurring line item in the monthly operating budget. In addition, the ability to access and use new applications immediately as they become available is a huge cost saver, because it allows call centers to trial new applications as they come out.

Reduced Ongoing Costs

SaaS solutions also deliver lower ongoing costs because typically the provider takes on the maintenance of the system — including software upgrades, equipment replacement and troubleshooting. This reduces the strain on existing IT staff (and if you’re a small business, maybe you don’t have an “IT staff”) and also lets companies avoid having to hire specialized IT teams to oversee their VoIP call center system.

Ongoing costs are also reduced because services can be added or customized more quickly, without adding significantly to the overall cost of the service, and without have the vendor’s tech support “truck roll” back to your premise every time a change needs to be made. In fact, most aspects of managing the system, including new software launches, adding new features, adding or adjusting call routing schemes, adding or dropping agents, creating reports, etc., can be handled

centrally through a user-friendly, Web-based interface. This means less need for IT support, as call center supervisors and managers can now handle daily management of the system.

SaaS solutions also deliver savings over time because of their high scalability. As a business grows or shrinks in size, and as cycles change based on the economy or the time of year, a hosted system can be correspondingly scaled up and down, based on the amount of volume and the number of agents needed. This flexibility leads to pricing schemes where ongoing cost savings can be easily realized. For example, depending on which service you select, you can pay based on the number of agents you are currently using (i.e. some vendors offer a flat fee for using the software, multiplied by the number of agents). In addition, some vendors are offering pricing on a “per seat” basis, which is particularly beneficial if you happen run a call center where most of your agents are part time.

Faster Time To Market

This is arguably the biggest advantage of the SaaS model. As mentioned earlier, if you want to get a VoIP call center up and running quickly, SaaS is the way to go, as all you will need only a broadband connection (typically T1/T3 or Ethernet), some computers, some headsets and some agents. The rest is all choosing which software you want to use and configuring it properly. Obviously, this ease of deployment gives SaaS a huge advantage over on-premise systems, which can be costly and time consuming to set up.



Fast integration with existing IT systems is also where SaaS now has a big advantage. Most vendors are now providing pre-integration for legacy CRM and business systems, which helps the integration piece go a lot smoother. In fact, many systems now offer support for Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), which helps companies save money because they can keep their existing legacy software and servers, yet they can access their customer data the same way they always have. This means the agents have access to any historical data they need while they're on the line with the customer, and can have it displayed right on their desktop, which in turn leads to better customer service. This is an area where today's SaaS solutions have made great strides.

Also, with SaaS, "faster time to market" doesn't just pertain to the time it takes to establish a new VoIP call center — it also pertains to the ease and speed with which one can add new software and services at any time. With SaaS, a company can start out with the basics and then add new apps in "piecemeal" fashion, thus giving it the ability to quickly adapt to rapidly changing market conditions.

Faster Access To New Technologies

Another major advantage of the SaaS model is the ability to get new software releases as soon as they become available. This means customers can quickly access and "trial" new applications and beat their competitors to the punch with the deployment of advanced new software which can bring new efficiencies. In addition, SaaS typically means you get the most up to date hardware and computing technology -- all the way down to the processors used in the servers. Plus, with advanced encryption and security technologies, plus fail-over locations for built-in redundancy, today's data centers are more secure than ever, thus giving companies greater peace of mind.

Enabling The "Virtual Contact Center"

Another advantage of SaaS solutions is the fact that they are ideal for facilitating the "virtual contact center," a term used to describe a contact center which can be accessed remotely from any computer with a high speed Internet connection. There are many advantages to this architecture, perhaps the most compelling being the ability to use remote or home-based agents, which in recent years has become a very hot trend. With today's SaaS solutions, remote agents can have calls and other contacts routed to them just as if they were in the main center — plus they have access to all of the same software and features that their co-workers use, including access to legacy systems, "presence" and whatever else has been

bundled with the solution. Obviously, this type of architecture is ideal for companies with geographically dispersed centers.

Additionally, the SaaS model enables companies with multiple contact centers to tailor or customize their solution sets for each individual center's needs. As companies often assign different tasks to different centers, each center typically needs its own suite of software. At the same time, all end points on the network are part of the same unified system, so things like call monitoring, call recording, workforce management and just about any other administrative function can be carried out from a central location for each center, each defined group of agents, or each remote agent.

The SaaS model is also ideal for facilitating the "informal contact center," a relatively new concept in customer service wherein the contact center is extended out to other "knowledge workers" in a company or organization who can handle more complicated customer issues that can't be handled by an agent. (This where the "pay-as-you-go" pricing model is best applied, as you don't want to pay by the seat with the "informal contact center" model.)

Improved Agent Efficiency

Today's SaaS solutions also bring improved efficiency through more intelligent routing of customer contacts. With the SaaS model, contacts can be distributed intelligently among all agents, at all locations, thus leading to vastly improved agent performance. This has obvious benefits for "multimedia" contact centers which handle a range of IP-based channels, such as VoIP, video-over-IP, IVR, Web chat, text messaging and email. For example, if a particular agent's phone calls dry up for a period, then that agent can jump in and start taking emails or web chats which are in other queues, instead of just sitting there, waiting for the next call to come in. This intelligent routing of contacts results in economies of scale in terms of agent performance, because each agent's unique range of skills is put to more efficient use. Furthermore, "virtualizing" the contact center gives customers a sense that they are contacting a whole, cohesive company — not just the phone department, or the email department, or the Web chat department. And as the experience becomes more seamless, customer satisfaction increases.

High Scalability

SaaS solutions also enable VoIP call centers to more readily handle sudden spikes in call volume. A good example of this is a product recall, where suddenly your contact center gets flooded with complaints from angry customers. But there are more common occurrences, like, for example, an online retailer which does most of its business

during the holiday season. As holiday time approaches, a company using SaaS for its contact center can ramp-up agent capacity as needed. Yet another example might be a not-for-profit running a fundraising campaign — or a government agency, such as the IRS — which also see spikes in call volume on a seasonal basis. This ability to scale rapidly is a key advantage which SaaS has over on-premise systems.

Better Control Over Business Rules

SaaS solutions also give companies improved ability to apply business rules across all contact center locations. So, for example, agents can only log onto the system when they're scheduled to; can only access the applications and network resources they're allowed to use; or can only contact others within the company based on their "presence" or availability. In addition, contacts can be routed to each agent based on pre-defined, yet fully configurable rules, based on which types of contacts (or customers) that agent is best suited to handle. As another example, custom scripts can be delivered to a certain agent, to handle a certain call, thus enabling the agent to calm the customer down and resolve the call, or perhaps up-sell and cross-sell at junctures which are determined by management. All of this means companies can create their own unique customer service experiences in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors. That is what makes today's SaaS solutions a far cry more sophisticated compared to the ASP offerings of a few years ago.

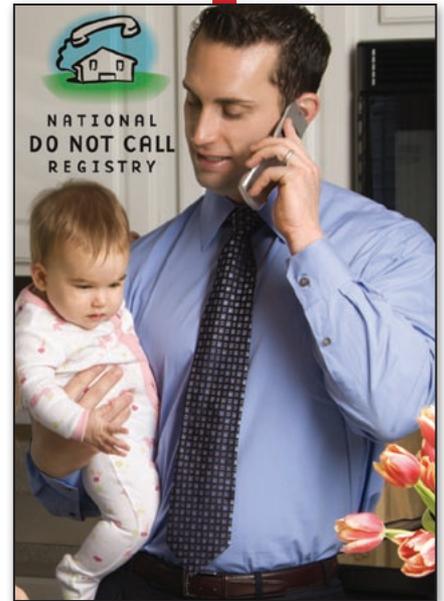
Improved Customer Satisfaction

All of the above advantages combine to create a radically improved customer experience (and agent experience). By "virtualizing" the contact center — and by unifying all of the software into one cohesive whole — agent performance is improved and customer satisfaction is increased. This not only springs from the fact that agents are able to display all of the relevant information about the customer on their desktops, but also because today's SaaS systems do a very good job of "identifying" customers based on their historical data. For example, a common complaint with many call center systems is that, after the customer enters his or her account information via the IVR, very often the agent has to request that information again (this typically stems from poor integration between the IVR and ACD). But with today's advanced solutions, the customer's information "goes along with them" as their call proceeds through various stages in the call center. By being able to identify the customer, using information from their past purchases and interactions, agents can provide more tailored, or "personalized" service, thus giving the customer a feeling that the company really knows them, and wants their business — not that they're "just another call in the queue."



An Update On The Federal Do-Not-Call Registry

In February, U.S. Congress passed two bills, S. 781 and H.R. 3541, that individually and collectively affect the federal do not-call registry. Together, the bills will extend the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) ability to collect fees to maintain the DNC registry. (This is important because its authority to do so was set to expire at the end of 2007.) Additionally, the bills would eliminate the automatic removal of telephone numbers from the registry every five years. Since June of 2003, when the do-not-call registry was created, more than 140 million home and mobile telephone numbers have been added. (The FTC reports that some 76 percent of American adults have placed their number or numbers on the list.) At the time of its creation, the list was to have been purged after five years, since many of the numbers would be old, changed or otherwise outdated, which was considered burdensome and unfair to the industries that employ outbound calling.



But with the passage of H.R. 3541 (titled "The Do Not Call Improvement Act"), this "purge" will no longer take place. States the bill, "In issuing regulations regarding the 'do-not-call' registry of the Telemarketing Sales Rule...the Federal Trade Commission shall not provide for any date of expiration for telephone numbers registered on the 'do-not-call' registry, nor for any predetermined time limitation for telephone numbers to remain on the registry."

Senate bill 781 basically accomplishes the same thing as H.R. 3541, striking the expiration date from the original language used in the creation of the registry, in particular in the section that pertains to the federal government's ability to collect fees associated with the registry.

And the fee collecting has been fairly lucrative. In January of this year, the FTC announced a complaint and fines against California-based Voice-Mail Broadcasting Corporation (VMBC), which made over 46 million pre-recorded calls to numbers on the DNC registry. The agency settled the charges, barring VMBC from violating the FTC's Telemarketing Sales Rule (TSR ([News - Alert](#))) and requiring them to pay \$180,000 in civil penalties. Other high profile charges associated with violations of the DNC registry have been filed against Ameriquest Mortgage Company, Global Mortgage Funding, Inc., ADT Security Services, Inc., Columbia House, Craftmatic Industries,

DirecTV ([News - Alert](#)) and a variety of mortgage and credit counseling companies.

In November 2007, the FTC announced it was going to get tough: it was going to begin a crackdown on companies and individuals accused of violating the requirements of the registry. The crackdown resulted in six settlements and collectively imposed nearly \$7.7 million in civil penalties.

After the crackdown, FTC Chairman Deborah Platt Majoras said, "By bringing enforcement actions...we will ensure that the small number of bad actors pay a price for not adhering to the law and respecting consumers' privacy requests."

Altogether, since the registry was established in 2003, the FTC and Department of Justice have filed 34 law enforcement actions against individuals and companies that allegedly violated registry provisions. In total, the two agencies have collected more than \$16 million in civil penalties – the largest of which was \$5.3 million from DirectTV in 2005.

So how, you might wonder, does the federal government plan to account for the fact that after a while, this registry is going to get woefully out of date, since the necessity of re-registering numbers has been removed?

When the agency announced its decision to drop the expiration back in the fall of 2007,

it stated that "Also, the Registry has been implemented successfully for five years and has included a scrubbing program that has removed disconnected and reassigned numbers each month."

H.R. 3541 attempts to address this, by adding language that with regards to the "Removal of Invalid, Disconnected, and Reassigned Telephone Numbers," "The Federal Trade Commission shall periodically check telephone numbers registered on the national 'do-not-call' registry against national or other appropriate databases and shall remove from such registry those telephone numbers that have been disconnected and reassigned. Nothing in this section prohibits the Federal Trade Commission from removing invalid telephone numbers from the registry at any time."

Basically, the bill has taken the burden of keeping the list fresh out of the hands of consumers (as it would have been if consumers had to re-register their numbers after five years) and placed the onus on the FTC for making sure the list is current.

Finally, said the FTC in its decision, "[T]he Registry has enjoyed unprecedented popularity and helped enhance the privacy of the American public in a tangible way."

In other words, it's an election year.



Ten Things You Didn't Know About Acoustic Shock



Sennheiser (www.sennheiserusa.com) recently introduced its BW900 model, a business-class wireless office headset which includes a feature called ActiveGard designed to protect wearers against acoustic shock, a common but not well understood problem in the contact center and for all enterprise headset users. I recently got a chance to have a short conversation with Eric Palonen, Product Manager for Sennheiser Consumer Electronics.

SV: What is ActiveGard?

EP: ActiveGard is an amazing technology that protects headset users from exposure to sudden, high-amplitude (volume) acoustical energy (Acoustic Shock). Basically, it is a hearing protection technology that safeguards headset users from damaging in-call volume.

SV: How important is the inclusion of ActiveGard in the BW900?

EP: The inclusion of ActiveGard in the BW900 was a no-brainer for us. As each and every wired telephone headset we made included ActiveGard, it was necessary to include the technology in a wireless device where there is even less control over incoming call volume.

Most other-brand wireless headset devices utilize a volume control for protection, however by the time users reach for it, the damage has been done the loud acoustical energy that has caught users by surprise and caused them to move the earpiece away from their head has already exposed them to the potential for hearing damage. The BW900's inclusion of ActiveGard protects the user at all times, even when their hands are tied and is present in both our wired and wireless headsets.

SV: What are some of the advantages BW900 users receive thanks to the inclusion of ActiveGard?

EP: The first, of course, is a wide-reaching blanket of safety. Because the limiter kicks in before the signal ever reaches the ear, and does not let up until the signal is below the threshold of activation, the user is always protected below the OSHA limit. Rather than cut off the volume level at the OSHA recommended level, we do so below it, to guarantee safety against acoustic shock. The second is clarity. The ActiveGard system can limit the volume level without distortion from the earcap speaker, meaning that the volume level is clear and consistent without artifacts and distortion that can

ruin an important conversation. When company dollars are on the line, every second is critical and the integrity of the call quality must remain perfect. Lastly, we provide peace of mind being able to take any call with confidence is only going to enhance productivity.

SV: How does ActiveGard work to offer protection?

EP: The ActiveGard system is so effective, yet transparent, that you won't hear it working because you are never exposed to dangerous volume levels any longer. It utilizes a fast-acting limiter to remove the energy from a high-amplitude acoustic burst. The limiter sustains action until the source signal drops below the activation threshold. As stated before, it does this without adding distortion.

SV: How great is the risk of hearing damage for unprotected headset users?

EP: Without a wired or wireless headset with ActiveGard, the user is exposed to Acoustic Shock every second of every call — it can happen at any time for any reason, in any circumstance.

SV: Is it important for wireless headsets to include protection for user's ears?

EP: Protecting an office or contact center employee's hearing is as important as protecting any other company asset; in fact, the employee is the most important asset a company has. Headsets without ActiveGard compromise the employees' fundamental ability to communicate, and thus, there is no communication.

SV: How common is acoustic shock, and is the risk higher for mobile users?

Acoustic shock has always been around; however it was never prevalent in the spotlight of any institution until now. Today, with greater emphasis on employee health and working conditions, acoustic shock is quickly becoming

as common as any other work-related illness.

The increasing number of calls handled on a mobile certainly increases the exposure, especially when these calls are managed on a headset without ActiveGard.

SV: How does ActiveGard recognize the safe volume for the user, before switching back into surveillance mode?

EP: A complex series of measurement circuits determine the on and off threshold of the limiter. These circuits are always listening and sustain the limiter until the signal dips below the threshold. By using volume level to determine when the limiter should kick in, the chance that the ActiveGard limiter misses an acoustic shock is eliminated.

SV: Has Sennheiser received positive response for headsets their headsets that include the ActiveGard technology?

EP: Overwhelmingly positive. If you are in charge of your company's headsets, ask yourself this question: "How important are the ears of your employees?" We have asked this question and received the answer in the form of a "thank you" by providing safe headset solutions for entire corporations.

SV: Have those purchasing the BW900 specifically sought protection for their hearing when making the choice for that headset?

EP: The BW900 has had two particular buyers— those looking for the best in noise reduction technology and those looking for safety without sacrificing multi-connectivity. The BW900 exceeds the requirements of both of these needs.

SV: Thank you for your time.

More information about Sennheiser and its safety initiatives is available at www.tmcnet.com/channels/headsets/



Making More With Less: Contact Center Industry Executive Recommendations For Operating A Call Center In An Economic Downturn

The call center, as an entity, has often been tasked with “making more with less.” Customer expectations are rising, labor costs are rising, competition is rising. So what’s going down? Budgets, frequently. But in the past, companies could rely on a high degree of spending from consumers and businesses. The potential sales were there, they merely had to compete for them. Fast-forward to 2008 and, whether you agree the U.S. is at the beginning of an official recession or not, it’s impossible to pretend that the economy in general, and consumer and b-to-b pennies in particular, are not being pinched.

So what steps can call center entities take to cope during an economic downturn? For answers, we turned to executives from prominent contact center solutions and service provider companies. Executives were asked, “What is the most important technology for the call center to invest in during slower economic growth times?” Without further ado, we present their sage advice.

Mark Lepko, President Altitude Software North America

The economic slowdown represents an opportunity for contact centers looking for ways to differentiate while cutting costs. Today, there is a clear shift in contact center operations, with contact centers focusing on first-call resolution as a priority, aiming to reduce costs and maximize agent performance. The ROI arising from technology solutions that help achieve reduced numbers of second calls for the same inquiry is really quite significant. Studies indicate that, in some situations, 50 percent of calls could have been avoided if correctly handled on a first call.

Although the problem is identified, the solution is not easy to implement. It requires a combination of providing training/coaching to agents, defining the right processes and having the appropriate technology infrastructure in place. In this respect, a unified agent desktop solution is essential for contact centers aiming for more efficient and productive agents while improving success rates in helping customers

with queries. Since agents have to simultaneously manage multiple interaction channels, use business applications and guide the conversation with the customer through a script, all relevant information must be a click away.

A unified agent desktop is a huge step towards getting the right answers within acceptable periods of time. The unified desktop not only saves time, but also optimizes agent performance in what amounts to a direct impact on the contact center bottom line.

Tom Chamberlain, Director of Business Process Marketing Aspect Software

In a slowing economy, companies are clearly focused on increasing efficiency and maximizing resources in all operational areas. In the contact center, this means automating the right processes to enhance service levels, not hinder them; leveraging automation technology like predictive dialers and voice portals; taking advantage of other applications that can increase first-call resolution.

Voice portals and self-service solutions. Self-service tools, when implemented correctly, make the best use of agent resources by automating routine portions of an interaction, like providing account balances or confirming appointments, and seamlessly transferring the call to an agent for more complex portions. Automating routine transactions is critical to efficiently handling



more calls. Additionally, voice self-service is a valuable solution for customers that call regarding sensitive, private issues that they would not want to share with an agent, such as high debt information, credit card numbers, repossession or foreclosure status. This technology is essential in a slow economy because it allows contact centers to do more with less. However, the key to the success of this technology is to ensure it is designed to give customers the information they need, not prevent them from talking to agents.

Predictive dialers. Advanced outbound dialer technology is another way for contact centers to improve efficiency, which is particularly important for sales and collections contact centers during a slowing economy. Solutions that offers campaign development tools, call table filters, predictive dialing, call blending, browser-based agent desktop, real-time statistics and historical and custom reporting can maximize the number of calls handled and ensure that agents reach customers at the right time to increase debt collection and to improve sales rates. This enables companies to increase revenue and reduce operating costs in the contact center.

Unified communications. More companies are seeing the value of a unified communications strategy that incorporates the contact center, and are realizing that UC offers a unique opportunity to help improve first-time call resolution and contact center efficiency. By interoperating contact



center applications with UC technologies, contact center agents can shorten problem-resolution cycles, answer customer inquiries quickly and more effectively upsell services and/or products to prospective customers because they're able to identify subject matter experts more quickly and easily. Leveraging standards-based and unified contact center solutions enables this easy interoperability with presence engines and other UC tools. This is another example of how contact centers can improve processes and efficiencies to save money and maximize agents' times and improve overall customer loyalty, which is extremely important during a slow economy.

Roger Woolley, Senior VP Marketing Autonomy (News - Alert) etalk

In a slowing economy, it is extremely critical for a company to be able to retain its existing customers. But in order to meet the needs and expectations of your customers, you must have a means of first understanding what those needs and expectations are. This is where speech analytics, and more specifically multichannel interaction analysis, can be of utmost benefit to the entire business, not just in the contact center. By automatically mining the conceptual and contextual meaning of recorded and in-progress customer interactions, the business can uncover customer insight to customer service via a variety of touch points — from sales and marketing to customer support and business operations. Only when this information is known can the business truly understand its customers and ensure they stay loyal.

Lou Ann Jones, Director, Customer Contact Solutions Avaya

There are a couple of technologies that are valuable to the contact center in a slowing economy. Self-service with speech is key we can serve a customer effectively while minimizing human intervention which is a substantial cost saving and has a rapid return on investment. Self-service can cut wait times for customers down to nothing and increases agent productivity and agent satisfaction.

In addition to self-service, outbound proactive contact with automated agents maximizes agent productivity by screening out non-productive interactions, like answering machines, and in many cases does not require human intervention: for example, bill pay, appointment reminders, flight change information and fraud alerts. We know that "voice" is king — but auto-

mated transactions can be offered to give the customer the "choice" to do business they way they want to do business.

Getting and maintaining customers is a competitive necessity well executed technology like self-service and proactive outbound contact help keep the competitive edge while keeping an eye on the bottom line.

When the economy shows signs of slow growth, operational expenses seem to undergo extra scrutiny. In the contact center, that often means taking a fresh look at the organization's biggest expense — the agent population — and whether or not the team is operating at its full potential.

Rick Glew, VP of Marketing IEX

Customer satisfaction and keeping a watchful eye on the bottom line are no doubt important in both good economic times and bad. However, when the economy shows signs of slow growth, operational expenses seem to undergo extra scrutiny. In the contact center, that often means taking a fresh look at the organization's biggest expense — the agent population — and whether or not the team is operating at its full potential.

After a thorough evaluation of scheduling, service and skill gaps, many organizations turn to automated workforce management (WFM) tools for improving staff scheduling and agent management. These tools have proven to bring a number of efficiency gains to the contact center. From enhancing agent productivity and boosting morale to lowering costs and increasing customer satisfaction, WFM tools offer substantial bottom-line savings. And it doesn't matter if the contact center has 50 agents or 10,000.

Whether the center is small or large, WFM technology has become a must-have for centers seeking ways to reduce costs while increasing productivity — particularly in light of the slowing economy.

Steve Boyazis, Executive VP InfoCision Management Corp.

There are two investment areas that make sense during slower economic periods. The first area involves items that build operational efficiency. The second involves the customer relationship tools that help you build a connection with the consumer over multiple interactions. The management challenge is picking the area that brings the highest ROI. If you struggle with agent utilization, for example, you have several different options; from scheduling software and queue management systems to improved IVR and voice messaging that will help to keep consumers on hold a few extra minutes. On the CRM side, anything that builds your business intelligence database for clients with whom you expect to have a long-term relationship will have great returns. It will allow you to build history into future calls, identify the best times to reach certain consumers, gauge appetites for cross-sells and help you integrate a full multimedia campaign.

In summation, since about 55 to 65 percent of a call center's cost is in operations, the first choice should be to make sure you are utilizing operating resources as efficiently as possible. Then, if you have a customer base with which you expect to have a long-term relationship, the real ROI comes from business intelligence and anything that helps you build lasting client connections.

Matt Taylor, Product Marketing Manager Interactive Intelligence

A particularly valuable technology to call centers in a slowing economy is workforce management. It's critical that when inbound demand slows, call centers are able to quickly and easily adjust staffing requirements by either re-allocating or reducing staff. To maximize the value of WFM, customers should be sure that their system gives them tight integration to their ACD so they can receive accurate and real-time data, enabling them to most effectively plan schedules and make changes on-the-fly. The ability to create schedule simulations is also key to account



for potential future variances. In addition, the system should include real-time adherence with instant notification of compliance so customers can immediately act on irregularities. Another important component to maximizing staffing is blended dialing technology. The ability to instantly re-allocate inbound agents to outbound agents can significantly help call centers create demand when business is slow. A very cost-effective way to conduct outbound campaigns is with automated outbound IVR technology, which frees up agents to focus solely on revenue-generating activity. Finally, whatever technologies call centers use, it's critical that the underlying architecture is open, software-based and extensible so they can quickly and cost-effectively create new applications and modify existing ones to adapt to whatever economic conditions the future brings.

Paolo Coppo, Marketing & Business Development VP
Loquendo

The necessity of at least partial automation of customer support via CRM (mostly due to economic reasons), is anything but new. There are a huge number of companies that have considerable costs and resources dedicated to call/contact centers and that depend on them for a significant part of their business and support.

There is usually some conflict between the needs of people calling in, and providers that provide the service. Callers want to have their needs quickly and courteously met. From the end user's perspective, nothing beats having an empowered and well trained person on the organization's front end. But from the provider's perspective, well trained and empowered customer service representatives are expensive. In the same way, providers want the call center to please customers in a cost-effective manner. Users and providers do not use the same criteria when measuring VUI usefulness and effectiveness. The user's criteria are, for example, "Can I get the information or perform the transaction I want?"; "Is the result worth my effort to get it?"; "Do I feel like I'm receiving a valuable service?" The provider's criteria are: "Does it reduce the load on customer service agents?"; "Are users satisfied with the experience?"

By these criteria, a VUI that gracefully and elegantly ends up routing most calls

to a human operator is not meeting providers' needs. On the other hand, a VUI that never routes a call to a human operator is not meeting the needs of some end-users. Achieving a balance between the sometimes-conflicting requirements of end users and providers is part of the design process.

Ed Margulies, Senior Director of Product Strategy, CRM Service Products
Oracle

The most valuable technology in call centers in a slowing economy is hosted infrastructure technology and the software-as-a-service (SaaS) business model that goes along with it. There are three big issues our customers are talking about that support this view: 1) "Try Before You Buy." During economic downturns, more conservative approaches are often adopted in the area of testing and validating call center technology. SaaS offers a viable and more conservative way to validate technology before a larger investment is made. 2) "Capital Budget Constraints." During slower economic periods, capital equipment budgets are often lowered or altogether eliminated. SaaS alternatives shift what would have been a capital expense to an operational (and short-term) one. 3) Finally, "Workforce Flexibility." For contact center managers, both recruiting and managing the workforce during economic downturn is crucial. For example, some contact center workers are feeling the pinch in commuting costs and the costs of meals when they are not at home. The cost of gas alone gives prospective employees pause in determining "where" they want to work. With many SaaS solutions, remote agents are enabled therefore providing a lower-cost alternative for workers — and especially their employers.

Brian Smits, Global Director of Marketing
TouchStar (News - Alert)

To help the call center industry in this difficult economy, TouchStar is helping our clients build their outsourcing business by marketing for them and we are also offering trials of three technology solutions that can immediately drive profitability. The three solutions include: a Best Time to Call application, our on-site or hosted predictive dialer, and our new unified communications solution.

The "Best Time to Call" application identifies the best time and method to contact specific

records; this significantly increases productivity. Many call centers already know that predictive dialing can be used to increase revenue or reduce labor expenses; we continue to see growth in predictive dialing sales because our systems integrate with any PBX and because telemarketing works. Our "Unify" application unifies multiple communications devices and applications while enabling automated activity logging across platforms and a single unified interface for click to: call, e-mail, chat, text, etc. Unify is built for call centers and businesses that have multiple customer segments and the need for multiple user interfaces and contact fields. Unify can save call centers money by consolidating their systems and reducing support costs.

Oscar Alban, Principal Global Marketing Consultant
Verint Witness Actionable Solutions

In today's economy, it's more critical than ever for organizations to focus on not just what is happening, but why. With speech and data analytics and customer feedback surveys, companies can transform customer interactions captured in their contact centers into actionable intelligence — intelligence they can use to take action that can make an impact on the business.

Understanding the underlying causes of performance trends and outcomes is critical to determining exactly how to more effectively improve quality, lower costs, generate revenue, increase customer satisfaction, and achieve other important business objectives.

Speech analytics automatically categorizes and analyzes call content to reveal the root causes of customer contacts, and surface trends that might otherwise go undetected without listening to thousands of calls. Data analytics uncovers call scenarios that either help or hurt your ability to meet key performance objectives. And customer feedback surveys provide that critical "outside-in" view of how consumers rate their customer service experiences. These analytics solutions can reveal product and process issues — including those in the back office — that impact customer service quality and satisfaction.

By enabling root-cause analysis, speech and data analytics and customer feedback surveys can help organizations transform customer data — structured and unstructured — into meaningful information. Armed with data, not hunches, organizations can better understand customer service issues and take appropriate action to optimize workforce performance and operational effectiveness.

<http://call-recording.tmcnet.com>

TMCnet Introduces... The Call Recording Community

- Compare Solutions
- Review Case Studies
- Get Independent Research & Analysis
- Trade Show/Conference Listings
- Training Resources

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The screenshot displays the TMCnet website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'ECHO Digital Voice Recording' prominently featured. Below this, a search bar is visible with the text 'Search TMCnet Type your search here'. The main content area is titled 'CALL RECORDING COMMUNITY' and includes a sub-section for 'Call Recording' with a list of featured products and services. On the right side, there's a sidebar with a 'Blogs' section listing authors like Rich Tahrani and Tom Keating, and a 'Search TMCnet' box. The bottom of the page shows a footer with various links and a 'Powered by' section.



The Yesterdays, Todays and Tomorrows Of Call Routing: A Talk With Aspect



Call routing is something most people (except those in charge of keeping the calls flowing) take for granted. The phone rings, you pick it up, and that's it. That, however, is not "it." The invention of the ACD, an event which launched the modern call center, is a topic that is spoken about with reverence today in call center circles. Some elements of the first ACD have almost passed into legend. To get some perspective on the topic and give it the respect it certainly deserves, I thought an interview with Aspect Software was in order. I got a chance to speak with Alan Burnstine, Senior Product Manager at Aspect Software

TS: First, can you provide readers with a little bit of background about Rockwell and the first ACD?

AB: Rockwell created the first intelligent automatic call distributor (ACD), the Galaxy, in 1973 — a monumental contribution to business technology and forever changed the way companies interacted with their customers. Today, there are not many businesses or government organizations that do not have at least one ACD. At its most basic level, an ACD distributes calls in an equitable pattern to a group of customer service agents, and monitors the performance of the system through reporting and administrative tools. This may sound simple, but in 1973, it required an awesome technological leap. Prior to this creation, ACDs required large hardware installations that were too complex and costly to be of much practical use.

TS: Is it really true that AT&T declined to develop a similar product because they thought there was no market for such a thing?

AB: AT&T said it would take them roughly seven to eight years to develop a new ACD system (a proposed delivery date of 1980). As a result, the airlines — who were requesting the technology to help them with reservations — sought out other vendors who might be able to deliver the solution more quickly. Collins Radio (which would shortly be acquired by Rockwell) answered the call and delivered a solution — The Galaxy — one year after the initial request.

TS: What issues are affecting call routing today and what is being done to meet these changing needs?

AB: The rise in IP contact centers and remote agents is really driving companies to look at ACD technology that can run on a session initiation protocol (SIP)-based voice over IP (VoIP) platform, as well as traditional TDM architectures. Advanced routing technology also allows contact centers to balance call loads among sites and achieve true simultaneous multisite queuing. This enables enterprises to manage large call volumes and route calls to the right agent regardless of location, anywhere in the world.

TS: What are truly cutting-edge call centers doing in terms of call routing today?

AB: Leading contact centers are recognizing the value in skills-based routing to get customers to the right agent with the right knowledge to resolve the call. This approach can involve a number of steps such as training the agents more effectively to ensure they are knowledgeable about products and services, or segmenting customers by region, type of inquiry, or spending value so that their inquiries could be routed to a specialized agent.

Cutting-edge contact centers are also looking at the benefits of a unified communications strategy that includes the contact center. Unified communications for the contact center streamlines and enhances customer-facing business processes with complete visibility and control, and enables businesses to seamlessly extend those processes beyond the contact center. Implementing a unified solution that can interoperate with presence engines can enable agents to identify knowledge workers in the enterprise and easily route customer calls to that expert, increasing first-call resolution.

TS: How can the right call routing solution help call centers to more easily achieve the

goal of first-call resolution?

AB: Skills-based routing is critical to transfer calls to the right resource, quickly and efficiently. With an ACD platform managing IP-based and PSTN-based agents, skilled workers can be located regardless of location and multiple sites, making it easier to respond to customer inquiries and resolve any issues on the first call. Also, ACD capabilities coupled with a unified solution with presence interoperability will help contact centers route calls to knowledge workers outside the contact center, to lower customer call-backs and increase first call resolution.

TS: What sort of announcements should we expect to see from Aspect in the near future?

AB: On March 10, Aspect Software announced a corporate strategy to educate the market on the critical role the contact center must play in the development of an organization's overall unified communications strategy. The company's all-in-one, IT-ready Aspect Unified IP and PerformanceEdge solutions will help power unified communications for the contact center. Aspect will announce subsequent product releases later this year in order to provide seamless interoperability between Aspect Software solutions and unified communications applications, such as presence engines to support this strategy.

Editor's note: For some TMCnet columnist perspectives on Aspect's unified communications announcement, read Rich Tehrani's (News - Alert) article, "Aspect Brings Unified Communications to the Contact Center" at www.tmcnet.com/1759.1 or my article, "Why Unified Communications in the Call Center?" at www.tmcnet.com/1758.1.

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By Joshua Shale,
Director of Marketing,
VoltDelta

Harnessing Speech Solutions With Minimal Up-Front Investment

Speech automation solutions can be an integral part of a contact center. By letting callers interact with the center using their most natural form of communication — their voice — speech automation enables the contact center to handle more calls with less agent interaction. By automating functions before connecting the caller to an agent and allowing callers to completely handle their own requests (such as account balance inquiries and placing a reorder), speech automation can make a very positive impact. Yet, because of the expense, perceived difficulty and overwhelming technology options, most contact centers have not implemented any speech solutions.

Traditional Speech Automation

Most common speech automation solutions are complicated. They involve premise-based hardware and software and require a very knowledgeable staff to implement and maintain them. In addition to the expense of managing the investment required in hardware, software and personnel, the ongoing licensing and maintenance costs can be considerable. Any decision to implement a premise-based speech automation solution requires a decisive return on investment (ROI) case. This lack of a clear-cut ROI prevents most contact centers from ever seriously considering speech solutions, which leaves only the largest and most complex centers to be the users of speech solutions.

Revolutionary Change – Hosted Speech Solutions

There is a new paradigm in speech solutions that changes the way all contact centers should think about implementing speech automation. Hosted speech solutions will now enable smaller centers to take advantage of the benefits of speech solutions and to allow the larger centers to complement their existing infrastructure to address seasonal peak volumes or special projects. The reasons for this are several. For one, the cost model is much more favorable. Hosted speech solutions require much less

of an up-front cost as the contact center does not have to pay for equipment, licenses and staff, and ongoing costs are on a per minutes used basis. This changes speech automation solutions from being a capital expenditure to an operational expense. Another reason is implementation. Because a hosted solution has the hardware, software and staff in place to manage the technology, the implementation project focuses on delivering the actual solution and not on hiring and training staff or managing servers and rack space. Scalability is another advantage for the hosted model. The “per minute of use” pricing model builds in the costs of adding additional ports, licenses and servers; and the new components are added seamlessly as they are needed based on capacity requirements. By removing up-front investment barriers, hosted speech solutions can be used by a great number of contact centers that may believe that they are out of reach.

About VoltDelta (News - Alert) Hosted Solutions

VoltDelta Hosted Solutions provides contact centers of all types access to leading-edge technologies including speech automation, IVR, ACD, VoIP transport, multimodal messaging and outbound alerts on the per-minute used model. To learn more, please visit www.voltdelta.com/voltdelta-hosted-solutions.

Speech: The Most Natural Form Of Self-Service

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

If you manage a contact center, chances are you have experience in offering self-service to customers: an IVR. A Web site with an (FAQ) list. You know why self-service is good: it automates the basic issues customers have that may take up a large portion of your expensive live agents' time. Outage and billing information for a utility. Store hours and stock availabilities for a retail store.

Touch-tone IVR for decades was the default for customer self-service. But the effectiveness of touch-tone IVR had a limit. Customers don't much like traditional touch-tone IVR. It's also highly inconvenient for an increasingly mobile customer base to hit tiny cell phone buttons while driving or walking.

Enter speech-enabled customer self-service. There is some evidence that customers actually like using speech for self-service. There are no buttons to push, most systems allow “barge in” (so customers don't have to wait for the end of a prompt), and speech systems are “smarter” and can allow for more ambiguous input.

At the debut of speech technologies for customer service, chances are, you ran into it only with airlines or large banks, and there's a reason for that: it was hideously expensive, required a team of IT personnel to administer, and needed a lot of space for hardware. So for years, it remained out of reach of most companies. (Premise-based technologies can be a little bit like shopping at Costco: if you don't have room for five gallons of mayonnaise in your pantry, then shopping there may not be for you.)

Hosted delivery has been a blessing for SMBs for many reasons, but primarily because it has put technologies formerly out of the reach of all but the largest companies — speech and CRM, to name two — into the hands (but off the shoulders) of smaller organizations.

For speech-enabled self-service, hosting is ideal. Call centers can reap the significant benefits of speech in terms of both call routing and offloading basic inquiries from agents, and bypass the large up-front costs and the complexities of managing speech technology on the administrative side. Not to mention convert their ad hoc server farms back into the lunch rooms and supply closets they were supposed to be in the first place.



If you have ever called 411 you have used

VoltDelta

VoltDelta has implemented voice applications in some of the largest contact centers for the most critical applications – Directory Assistance. Now, we offer our experience and expertise in speech solutions to all contact centers through our Hosted Speech Solutions. With a minimal up-front investment and no hardware, software or staff to acquire or maintain, VoltDelta makes harnessing the power of speech solutions simple, fast and effective.

Contact Us Today!

Please attend our webinar on April 15 – go to TMCNet.com and search for “Hosted Speech”



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Customer Interaction Solutions Magazine's 23rd Annual Top 50 Inbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking

This is the twenty-third year Customer Interaction Solutions magazine brings you its "Top 50" Teleservices Agency Ranking. In this issue, we're presenting the "Top 50" inbound portion of the ranking. (The outbound portion of the ranking was highlighted in the March 2008 issue.) Since its inception in 1986, our "Top 50" ranking has been used as the benchmark for choosing large-capacity/sized teleservices agencies.



Ranking Basis

Since the basis of our ranking is company size, Customer Interaction Solutions uses a measurable, third-party-verifiable aspect of teleservices to arrive at our list of the "Top 50" agencies: the number of minutes each agency was billed by each of its phone companies for telephone service for 12 months, encompassing November 2006 through October 2007. We have found this to be an accurate and reliable reflection of the amount of teleservices each agency does, and therefore, provides a true reflection of its size.

Qualification Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in this year's "Top 50," the agencies had to answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes between November 2006 and October 2007. The questionnaire had to be verified with the signature of each agency's president/CEO. In addition, each agency had to submit a letter of verification from each of its telephone service providers certifying the number of minutes for which it billed the agency during the designated period. (Our sincere gratitude is extended to all the carriers for their thorough and expeditious provision of these data.)

Exceptions

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

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

Understanding The Listings

As you read through the following list of "Top 50" agencies, you will notice that we have provided a numerical ranking of 1 through 35 (1 being the largest), but have not revealed the number of billable minutes used to arrive at this ordering. This was done out of respect for the confidential nature of this information to the many agencies included here that are privately held corporations. This year, only 35 companies met our minimum number of billable minutes to be ranked in the U.S. domestic inbound "Top 50." Seventeen companies met the minimum criteria to be included in the international category.

You will notice that the "Top 50" inbound has been divided into three categories: A, B, C and D. Category A is composed of U.S. service agencies whose primary business function is provision of telemarketing services for outside firms. If you are considering an international teleservices campaign, Category B consists of international teleservices agencies. Again this year we have separated out all international teleservices done by U.S. agencies and ranked those companies' international minutes in the International category, Category B. Domestic companies that are also ranked in the International category are marked with a dagger (†) in their domestic ranking.

Category C, which was introduced in 1998, is comprised of companies that provide purely interactive inbound services (no live operators). We added this category to reflect the growing demand for such interactive inbound services. Companies that are in the Domestic and International categories that are also ranked in the Interactive category are marked with a double dagger (‡) in their Domestic and International rankings.

Finally, Category D is the list of Top 50 Global Performers, which ranks companies according to their aggregate outbound, inbound, interactive inbound and domestic and international minutes.

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

Companies with enhanced listing are regular advertisers in Customer Interaction Solutions.



CATEGORY A — U.S. DOMESTIC

- 1. Teleperformance USA** † ‡
www.teleperformance.com
- 2. Sitel** * † ‡
www.sitel.com
- 3. Americall Group Inc. (a Teleperformance company)** *
www.americallgroup.com
- 4. ICT Group, Inc.** * † ‡
www.ictgroup.com
- 5. APAC Customer Services, Inc.** * † ‡
Web: www.apaccustomerservices.com
- 6. Telvista** † ‡
www.telvista.com
- 7. NCO Customer Management Inc.** * †
www.ncogroup.com
- 8. eTelecare Global Solutions** * † ‡
Ph: 480-477-1200; Fx: 480-477-1279
www.etelecare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1999
Size of projects accepted: 100,000 minimum
Type of calling: B-to-B: 8.5%; B-to-C: 91.5%
Outbound: 9.9%; Inbound: 90.1%
Specialization: customer care, sales and technical support
- 9. GC Services Limited Partnership** * ‡
www.gcserv.com
- 10. AFFINA - An HTMT Global Solutions Company** *
www.affina.com
- 11. The Connection** * ‡
www.the-connection.com
- 12. TCIM Services, Inc.** *
www.tcim.com
- 13. Protocol Services, Inc.** * †
www.protocolmarketing.com
- 14. InfoCision Management Corp.**
Ph: 330-668-1400; Fx: 330-668-1401
www.infocision.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1982
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 500 hours
Type of calling: B-to-B: 10%; B-to-C: 90%
Outbound: 75%; Inbound: 25%
Specialization: political, non-profit and religious fundraising; product/service sales and customer care; volunteer recruitment
- 15. Telerx** * ‡
www.telerx.com

- 16. DialAmerica Marketing, Inc.**
www.dialamerica.com
- 17. Cross Country Automotive Services** † ‡
www.crosscountry-auto.com
- 18. Charlton**
www.tcgcorp.net
- 19. Alta Resources** * ‡
www.altaresources.com
- 20. American Customer Care, Inc.**
Ph: 860-267-0686; Fx: 800-267-0846
www.americancustomercare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1986
Type of calling: B-to-B: 57%; B-to-C: 43%
Outbound: 57%; Inbound: 43%
Specialization: Customer service and help desk, outbound b-to-b and complete interaction management
- 21. O'Curran**
www.occurrence.com
- 22. USA 800, Inc.** *
www.usa-800.com
- 23. Synergy Solutions, Inc.** *
www.synergysolutionsinc.com
- 24. Hamilton Contact Center Services**
www.hamiltontm.com
- 25. NOVO1, Inc.**
www.novo1.com
- 26. FFP Global, Inc.** *
www.ffpglobal.com
- 27. Archway Marketing Services** †
www.archway.com
- 28. AnswerNet Network**
www.answernetnetwork.com
- 29. Power Direct, Inc.**
www.power-direct.com
- 30. L-3 Microdyne Outsourcing Inc.** *
www.microdyne.com
- 31. InService America**
www.inserviceamerica.com
- 32. OKS Ameridial Inc.**
www.oksameridial.com
- 33. Influent Inc.** †
www.influentinc.com
- 34. VXI Global Solutions** † ‡
www.vxiusa.com

- 35. Millennium Teleservices**
www.mmtel.com

CATEGORY B — INTERNATIONAL

- 1. Intelenet Global Services** * ‡
www.intelenetglobal.com
- 2. Teleperformance** ‡
Ph: +33 1 55 76 40 80; Fx: +33 1 55 76 40 81
www.teleperformance.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1978
Size of projects accepted: varies
Type of calling: B-to-B: 20%; B-to-C: 80%
Specialization: Outsourced CRM services, debt collection, technical support
- 3. Sitel** * ‡
www.sitel.com
- 4. Teleperformance USA (a Teleperformance company)** ‡
www.teleperformanceusa.com
- 5. NCO Group** *
www.ncogroup.com
- 6. eTelecare Global Solutions** * ‡
Ph: 480-477-1200; Fx: 480-477-1279
www.etelecare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1999
Size of projects accepted: 100,000 minimum
Type of calling: B-to-B: 8.5%; B-to-C: 91.5%
Outbound: 9.9%; Inbound: 90.1%
Specialization: customer care, sales and technical support
- 7. Telvista, Inc.** ‡
www.telvista.com
- 8. Hispanic Teleservices Corp., A Teleperformance company** *
www.htc.to
- 9. ICT Group, Inc.** * ‡
www.ictgroup.com
- 10. APAC Customer Services, Inc.** * ‡
Web: www.apaccustomerservices.com
- 11. PCCW Teleservices** * ‡
www.pccwteleservices.com
- 12. VXI Global Solutions, Inc.** ‡
www.vxiusa.com
- 13. Archway Marketing Services**
www.archway.com
- 14. VOXDATA** *
www.voxdata.com
- 15. 24-7 INtouch**
www.24-7intouch.com



16. Cross Country Automotive Services ‡
www.crosscountry-auto.com

17. Protocol Services, Inc. *
www.protocolmarketing.com

GROUP C — INTERACTIVE INBOUND

1. XO Interactive *
www.xo.com

2. Intelenet Global Services *
www.intelenetglobal.com

3. PCCW Teleservices *
www.pccwteleservices.com

4. Teleperformance USA
www.teleperformanceusa.com

5. Telvista, Inc.
www.telvista.com

6. Teleperformance
www.teleperformance.com

7. ICT Group *
www.ictgroup.com

8. GC Services Limited Partnership *
www.gcserv.com

9. APAC Customer Services, Inc. *
www.apaccustomerservices.com

10. Sitel *
www.sitel.com

11. Telerx *
www.telerx.com

12. Cross Country Automotive Services
www.crosscountry-auto.com

13. eTelecare Global Solutions *
www.etelecare.com

14. Alta Resources *
www.altaresources.com

15. The Connection *
www.the-connection.com

16. VXI Global Solutions
www.vxiusa.com

CATEGORY D — GLOBAL AGGREGATE RANKING

1. Teleperformance (includes all Teleperformance properties: Teleperformance, Teleperformance USA, Americall Group Inc. and Hispanic Teleservices Corp.)
www.teleperformance.com

2. Intelenet Global Services *
www.intelenetglobal.com

3. Sitel *
www.sitel.com

4. XO Interactive *
www.xo.com

5. NCO Customer Management, Inc.
www.ncogroup.com

6. ICT Group *
www.ictgroup.com

7. Telvista
www.telvista.com

8. eTelecare Global Solutions *
www.etelecare.com

9. APAC Customer Services, Inc. *
www.apaccustomerservices.com

10. Millennium Teleservices, LLC
www.mmtel.com

11. InfoCision Management Corp.
www.infocision.com

12. PCCW Teleservices *
www.pccwteleservices.com

13. GC Services Limited Partnership *
www.gcserv.com

14. DialAmerica
www.dialamerica.com

15. Protocol Services, Inc. *
www.protocolmarketing.com

16. TCIM Services, Inc. *
www.tcim.com

17. AFFINA, An HTMT Global Solutions Co. *
www.affina.com

18. Influent
www.influentinc.com

19. Cross Country Automotive Services
www.crosscountry-auto.com

20. VXI Global Solutions, Inc.
www.vxiusa.com

21. Archway Marketing Services
www.archway.com

22. The Connection *
www.the-connection.com

23. Telerx *
www.telerx.com

24. Charlton
www.tcgcorp.net

25. Teleservices Direct
www.tdirect.com

26. American Customer Care, Inc.
www.americancustomercare.com

27. NOVO 1
www.novo1.com

28. Synergy Solutions *
www.synergysolutionsinc.com

29. The Heritage Company, Inc.
www.theheritagecompany.com

30. VOXDATA *
www.voxdata.com

31. Hamilton Telecommunications
www.hamiltontm.com

32. OKS Ameridial Inc.
www.oksameridial.com

33. Alta Resources *
www.altaresources.com

34. L-3 Microdyne Outsourcing Inc. *
www.microdyne.com

35. 121 Direct Response
www.121directresponse.com

36. O'Curran
www.ocurance.com

37. Power Direct, Inc.
www.power-direct.com

38. AnswerNet Network
www.answernet.com

39. USA 800, Inc. *
www.usa-800.com

40. InService America
www.inserviceamerica.com

41. Greene, An RMG Direct Company
www.rmgdirectinc.com

42. FFP Global *
www.ffpglobal.com

43. 24-7 INtouch
www.24-7intouch.com

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Identity Protection And The Contact Center

Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in America and the world. According to an exhaustive study funded by the Federal Trade Commission, 8.3 million people — or about one out of 25 adults — were victimized by identify theft in 2005. Estimated losses were \$15.6 billion. The three major sources of fraud were new accounts, misuse of account numbers and misuse of credit cards and credit card account numbers. The most prevalent source was misuse of existing credit cards. While most victims report small or no out-of-pocket costs, one out of 10 incurred expenses of at least \$3,000 and spent at least 55 hours of their own time resolving problems like replacing lost documents or restoring damaged credit ratings.

In December, 2006, TJX Companies, which is made up of several popular retailers including TJ Maxx and Marshalls, admitted that hackers placed software on the company's network to capture data from at least 45.7 million customer credit and debit cards. Some numbers were used to make fake credit cards, which law enforcement authorities said were used to buy millions of dollars in expensive electronics from Wal-Mart and other retailers in Florida and elsewhere. According to the Boston Globe, several analysts estimated TJX's costs could run as high as \$1 billion, including legal settlements and lost sales.

So what has all this have to do with call centers? Actually — a lot. Call center agents, particularly those tasked with generating revenue, often have access to personal information such as credit and debit card numbers, banking accounts and social security numbers. A British newspaper investigation revealed that customer details, including bank accounts, passport numbers, mobile numbers and even medical records, can be bought from poorly paid Indian call centre workers for small amounts of cash. The paper reported that its investigator was able to buy financial details of 1,000 people for only \$5 per contact.

To combat identity fraud, the major card issuers including American Express ([News - Alert](#)), Discover Financial Services, JCB, MasterCard Worldwide and Visa International, formed the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council (PCI-DSS). The council is responsible for issuing and maintaining industry-wide data security standards. Previously, each card issuer had its own standards. The data security standard (PCI-DSS) is freely available (<https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org>). Enforcement is via contracts signed with the card issuer. Payment processors, service providers and merchants that process more than 20,000 e-commerce transactions and over one million regular transactions are required to engage a PCI-approved Qualified Security Assessor (QSA) to conduct a review of their information security procedures and scan their Internet points of presence on a regular basis. The card issuers can fine

Early in 2007, Minnesota became the first state to codify certain requirements of the PCI-DSS. Under the state's new Plastic Card Security Act, any company that suffers a data breach and is found to have been storing prohibited card data on its systems

will have to reimburse banks and credit unions the costs associated with blocking and reissuing cards. Such companies could also be subject to private action brought by individuals who might have been affected by a violation of the state law. Companies handling fewer than 20,000 payment card transactions per year are not liable under the law. Other states have pending legislation. At the federal level, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) has sponsored the Social Security Number Misuse Prevention Act. Social Security Number Misuse Prevention Act amends the federal criminal code to prohibit the display, sale or purchase of Social Security numbers without the affirmatively expressed consent of the individual, except in specified circumstances.

Payment card industry standards are just one of many industry and regulatory initiatives intended to protect personal identity. Contact centers need to be aware of the requirements that apply specifically to their environments and have a program for achieving compliance. At a minimum the program should include:

- In-depth reviews with in-house IT staff and compliance officials;
- Examination of pre-employment screening practices;
- Research into technologies and applications that encrypt or conceal sensitive information;
- Exploring ways to confirm caller identity without requiring protected information;
- If you use outsourcers, make sure that they are compliant with applicable requirements and are rigorous in hiring practices and internal security;
- Do not use default passwords; and
- Have a clear written policy regarding the processing of credit/debit cards and be sure everyone understands it.

The contact center is only one function in the enterprise that may have access to protected information. Compliance initiatives need to address the enterprise as a whole.

The Pelorus Group is an independent market research and consultancy company serving the financial services and telecommunications industries. For more information, visit www.pelorus-group.com.

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Tracey E. Schelmetic, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, CUSTOMER INTERACTION SOLUTIONS



Preventing The Dreaded “Diaper Coupon Identity Theft”

We all have pet peeves. I have a few more than most people. But the runaway madness with the number of online functions requiring unique alphanumeric passwords peeves me at least once a week. Never write passwords down, they tell us. Create a very unique alphanumeric password. Never use familiar words or numbers, like family names and birthdays. How about XGFlurb1*54yyz4927? That’s an excellent password that no thief will ever guess. Now, create 43 more passwords like that, for all your loans, mortgage, banks, savings and retirement accounts, newspaper subscriptions, utilities, health insurance accounts, telecommunications companies and any social networking sites you belong to.

Oh...and don't write them down!

I, like many parents, once upon a time signed up for a membership at Pampers.com, figuring that a few coupons in the mail now and then for what is one of the largest household expenses in the early childhood years — diapers, which might be made of titanium considering their cost — would be a good thing. And it has. Pampers’ parent company has shared my name with other partner companies, so a steady stream of coupons for all sorts of childhood-related expenses comes in via the mailbox.

It might take me years to undo the damage caused to my unscented baby butt wipe karma were I to show up at the store and have to pay full price for a package of Butt Swipers.

I received one of many e-mails I get from Pampers.com recently. Log in, it said, and enter to win \$10,000 for your child’s education. I figure by the time my child attends college, that should just about cover the costs of condiments in the school’s meal plan, but who am I to expect my child to excel academically without ketchup and tartar sauce?

So, to enter their contest, I had to log in. No problem. E-mail address first (easy) and password. That was the hard part. I created this account a long time ago, and the password to my “Pampers’ Parents Club” membership just isn’t engraved upon my memory the way my password to the Web site for the company that holds my mortgage. I tried to bluff my way through

with a few likely combinations. No go. In an effort to avoid time wasted fiddling with this fairly unimportant activity, I finally had to “request my password” via e-mail. But they didn’t send me my password. They sent a temporary password. After I used the temporary password, I was ushered to a secret page where I was obliged to change to a NEW password. (It wouldn’t have done if I had used my previous password: that’s bad for security.) I was also required to input the answer to several security questions... you know the type: mother’s maiden name, first school you attended, favorite musical group.

OK.

Did I mention that this is a Web site I joined to get coupons for diapers? Not the site that maintains my 401k, my checking account or my car loan, or Amazon, which has every credit card number in my possession stored in its databanks.

Now, far be it from me to scoff at the risks of DIAPER COUPON IDENTITY THEFT by unscrupulous individuals who want to rob me of my right to get \$1.50 off the next jumbo package of Pampers Cruisers I buy in the supermarket. It might take me years to undo the damage caused to my unscented baby butt wipe karma were I to show up at the store and have to pay full price for a package of Butt Swipers.

I’m not scoffing at online security. Doing I what I do, and reading what I do all day, I realize that the Internet is a dangerous frontier that made the Wild, Wild West look like a quilting party. It scares the willies out of my how many organizations have my personal information in their databanks that are undoubtedly bound by less-than-rigorous network security.

I do not, however, lay awake at night fretting than an imposter might log into my Pampers’ Parents Account and order their free potty-training guide using my identity. But hey...you never know, and unless you’ve got my mother’s maiden name, you are NOT getting that potty training guide, you would-be thieves.

So there.

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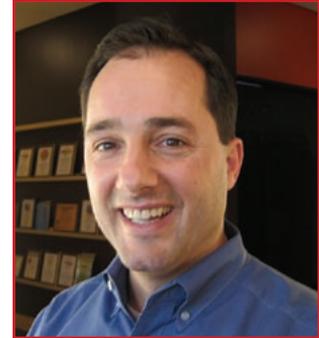
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Giving The Appropriate Response



By **Tim Passios**,
Director of Product Management,
Interactive Intelligence

Q I'm not sure how it is for guys who work in call centers, but as a woman we have to listen to inappropriate comments more often than we'd like. How would you handle someone who steps over the line if you were in our position?

A I'm certainly not in the same position as my female counterparts when it comes to inappropriate comments from callers. But having been a manager in a call center, I've had to intervene in many interactions where a caller has overstepped the boundaries of good judgment and respect.

To handle misbehaving callers, it's important to first distinguish between a caller being irate and being disrespectful and downright crude. When a customer is upset about something like a bill, for instance, their annoyance is often directed at a company and only channeled through the agent, the agent being the initial person the customer speaks with. So at its core, the caller's issue usually isn't "personal." However, when a customer says something unbecoming to an agent, and says it deliberately, it becomes very personal.

Unfortunately, in most such cases, the caller is male and the agent is female (though not always). "I like your voice, are you single?" "Do you come with the product?" Innocent enough, some people say, but many times the comments include far stronger sexual overtones that would qualify as harassment in any other business environment.

In a call center, though, agents must keep their cool and not escalate unacceptable conversations. Or at best, they're required to try to diffuse them. Imagine an inbound call in which a customer gets a bit too aggressive. Let's say "Mr. Smith" called with a few questions about a product, said he'd be in the area, and wanted to schedule a meeting with a sales person. But halfway through the conversation, he also lets it be known he wants the agent to be his escort for an evening:

"Yes, Mr. Smith, I've noted your contact information and will have our sales representative call you to schedule the meeting at our office."

"What say I call you back when I get in town, Cindy?"

"Oh, that won't be necessary. Our sales representative will conduct the meeting with you."

"Yes, but that will be during business hours. I'm talking about after hours. I'm staying downtown near your office and it would be my pleasure to meet you after work. Perhaps over dinner?"

"Mr. Smith, I am very flattered, but I have to say no. I'll be glad to answer any other questions and make sure our sales rep gets with you."

"Are you married, Cindy?"

"Well, no. But that is a personal matter, Mr. Smith, and isn't relevant

to my helping you today."

"I agree, but you could certainly help your company by..."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Smith. As you were informed at the beginning of this call, this conversation is being recorded for monitoring purposes. Therefore if you have no further questions, I'm recommending that we end the call at this point. Thank you for your interest in..."

Being polite but stern is the best way to handle a questionable situation. Yet, there are other times when "inappropriate" really is innocent, like in this recent entry for our "Outrageous Interactions" promotion.

"I was on a call to an elderly lady once, pacing nicely through my sales script, when after a couple minutes she suddenly interrupted and whispered 'Excuse me, I'm on the toilet and I thought you may have heard me tinkling.'"

You can reach your own conclusion about how the agent should have responded to that.

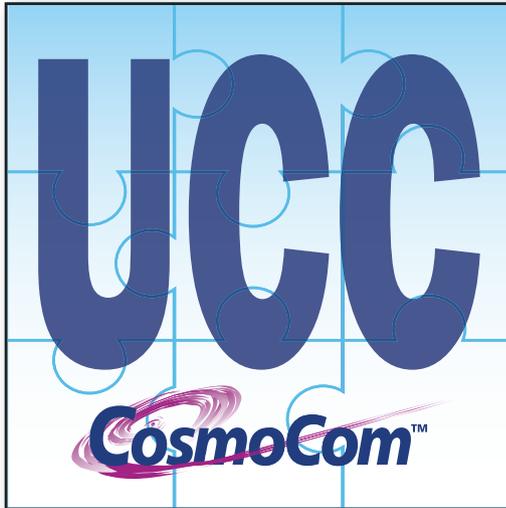
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Submit your entries before August 31, 2008; we'll announce the winner on September 30, 2008. For more details, the Official Rules and an online entry form, visit the "Outrageous Interactions" Web site at www.outrageousinteractions.com. Hawaii is calling.

Tim Passios (News - Alert) is Director of Solutions Marketing for Interactive Intelligence Inc. and has more than 17 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 3,000 installations in nearly 70 countries. For more information, contact Interactive Intelligence at info@inin.com or (317) 872-3000.

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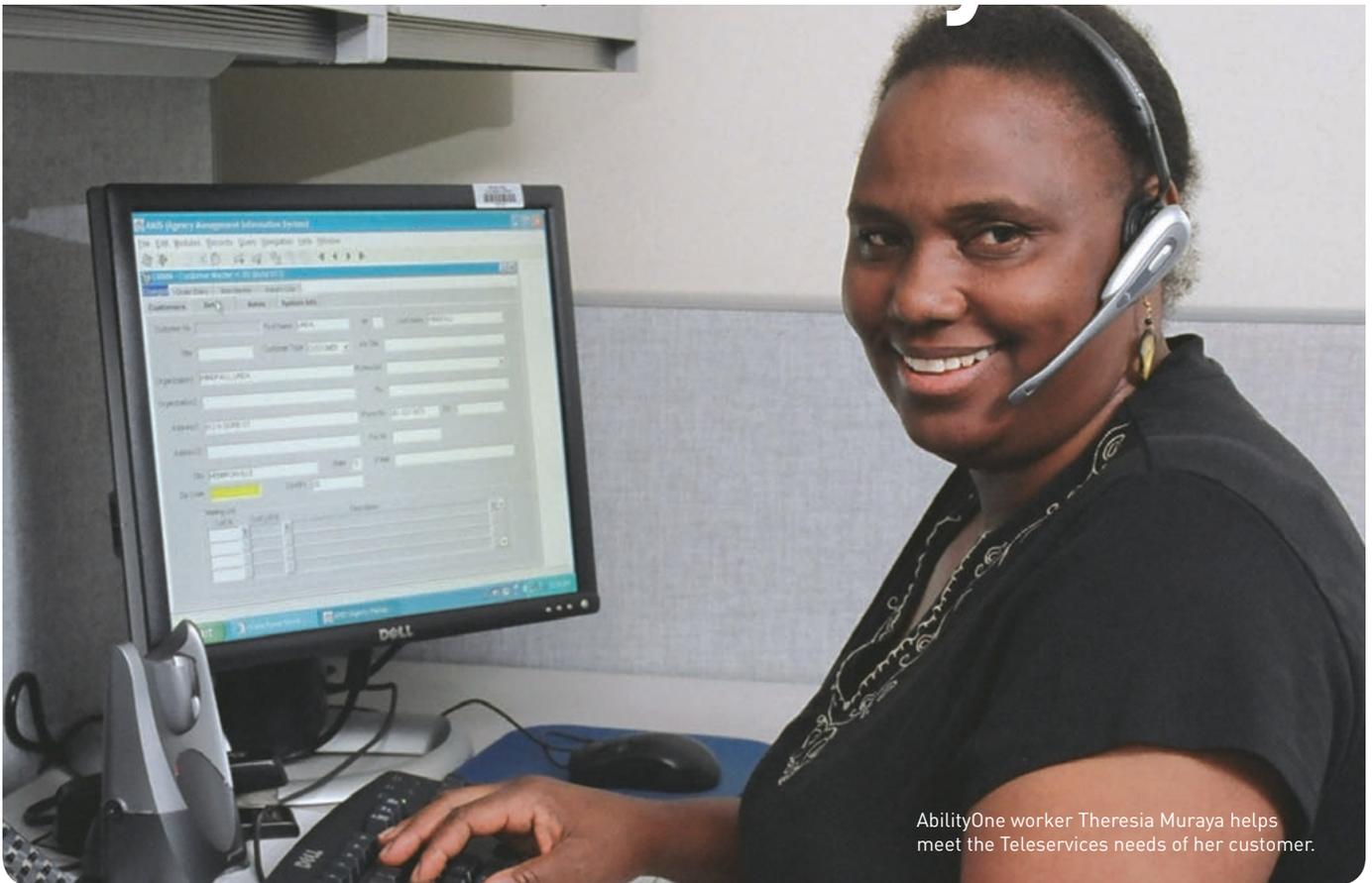
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