How Unified Communications Benefits The Call Center

Also In This Issue:

- 32 Principles of Modern Marketing

- Politics, Health Care, E-Mail and ...Coffee Shops?

- 9th Annual CRM Excellence Awards, Part Two

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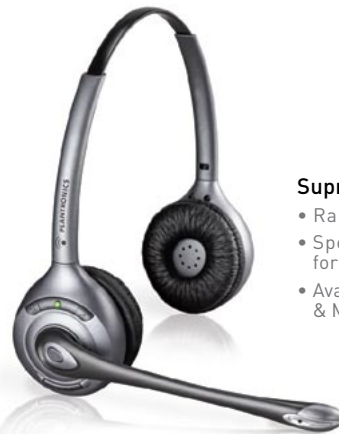
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32 PRINCIPLES OF MODERN MARKETING: PART I

The Dawn of New Media Digital Marketing

Nadji Tehrani, *CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.*

Today's marketers face many more options than those of just a decade ago.

Where once there were broadcast, print, direct mail, outdoor and telemarketing, there are now countless digital options. Today's new media marketing vehicles allow your message to be delivered to your prospect in the medium of their choice at the time they are looking to make a buying decision.

These digital or "New Media" outlets also empower marketers to pinpoint their audience based on the specific Web pages they visit and the specific content they read, resulting in higher ROI and fewer wasted impressions.

Having said the above, I now would like to share with you the new principles of modern marketing based on over 26 years of experience since we launched Telemarketing® magazine, which was originally positioned as "the magazine of electronic marketing" in June of 1982.

1. **If you're not on page one of major search engines, you don't exist. Sixty-eight percent of people DO NOT click beyond the first page.**
   In my marketing classes, both at TMC (News - Alert) and at some of our contact center conventions, I used to say that "if you don't market, you don't exist." Today, that principle is no longer complete and true simply because of the advent of digital marketing. We all know that nearly without exception, anyone who wants to learn about any topic, the first order of business is to go one of the leading Internet search engines. We also know that based on considerable research conducted by various organizations, 68 percent of people do not click beyond the first page. It is further understood that, of the remaining 32 percent, nearly half do not go beyond and in fact, look for the first page listings of a related search term. We further know that the higher the ranking of the executive searching on the Web, the less time he or she would have to look for information. Consequently, it is fair to assume that people who serve in a decision making capacity or senior management role hardly have time to go beyond the first page. Based on the above, it should be crystal clear that if you are not on the first page of the leading search engines, in today's new media and digital marketing age, you don't exist.

2. **Marketing is not a part-time job!**
   Throughout the last quarter of a century since our pioneering magazine, Telemarketing®, laid the foundation for today's trillion dollar contact center/CRM and customer care business, and as the owners of the registered trademark for Telemarketing®, we are led to believe that marketing is a 24/7 job and nothing less than that. Indeed, we have seen many entrepreneurial smaller companies wasting their marketing funds by placing and ad or two in a certain magazine and receiving seemingly no business from it. Thereafter, such a company would stop advertising or marketing and claim that advertising or marketing doesn't work. Worse than that, some ill-advised entrepreneurs and smaller companies have a tendency to cut out all marketing and advertising plans when business slows down. Nothing could be more damaging to an organization than stopping advertising and marketing, which are primarily meant to generate sales leads. It is common knowledge that in a slowing economy, many companies could lose as much as 40 to 50 percent of their current customer base. And, if this lost business is not replaced with new business, which usually comes from new sales leads, then it is only a matter of time before such a company would go out of business!!

3. **Warren Buffet's rule: To succeed in business…build a strong relationship with the media.**
   Warren Buffet, as the world's number one billionaire in terms of net worth and business

Nadji Tehrani, *CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.*

savvy, practices what he preaches. If you have been watching CNBC on a regular basis (as I do and I assume as most business people do) you will have noticed that at the time of this writing, Warren Buffet has been on CNBC on a regular basis for the last several weeks. As a matter of fact, one might say that the only regular commentator on CNBC, besides the anchormen and anchorwomen, is Warren Buffet. By appearing on CNBC with millions of viewers globally, he is not only sharing his experiences with the viewers, but he is also marketing his company Berkshire Hathaway in the most effective way at no cost!!

4. **Do not fight with the media… sure, this is common sense but it's NOT uncommon!**
   Believe it or not, in spite of the above, I have come across very few ill-advised companies that actually like to pick a fight with the leading media vehicles for practically no reason. Our knowledge of the industry has convinced us that these companies have either already vanished, or it is only a matter of time before they go out of business. One can almost say that if you're not active in the leading media of your industry, you also don't exist.

5. **To dominate your market, you need to dominate the integrated media.**
   In a number of these Publisher's Outlooks going back to the early 1990s, I have been vigorously promoting the concept of integrated marketing. Once again, it seems that we might have been slightly ahead of our time, because the rest of the world has finally just realized that integrated marketing, in today's business environment, is the only effective way to reach your market. Consequently, some consulting agencies and business publications have only recently started to admit that integrated marketing is the only way to go. To that I would say, "It's about time."

As a student of marketing, I also learned that there is no point in conducting any kind of a marketing strategy unless you want to dominate your market. It only makes sense to believe that in order to dominate your market, you must dominate print, events and online media and there is no shortcut to integrated marketing.

I look forward to sharing the rest of the 27 principles in future issues of Customer Interaction Solutions® magazine. **CIS**

As always, I look forward to your comments. You may e-mail them to me at ntehrani@tmcnet.com.

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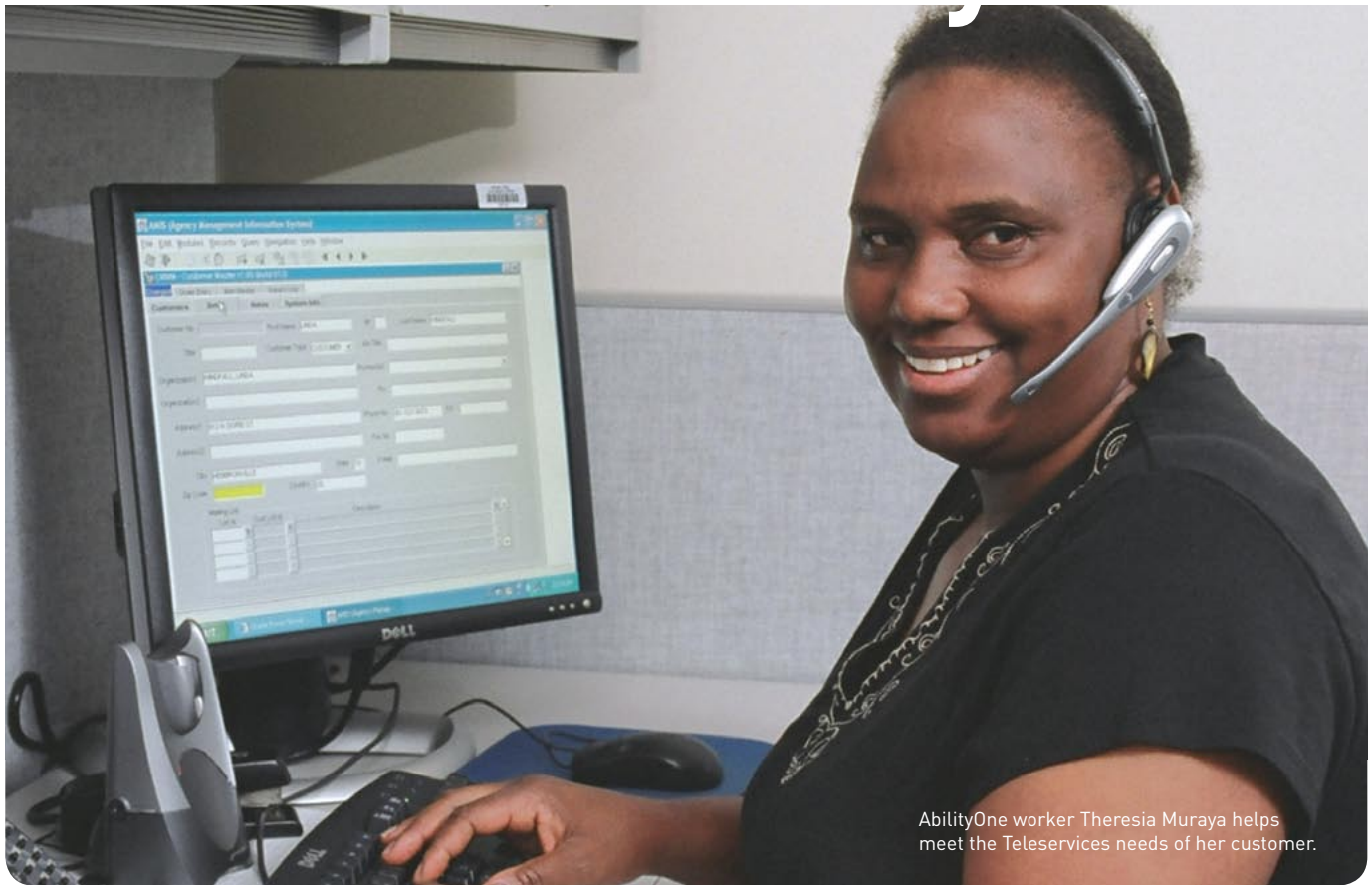
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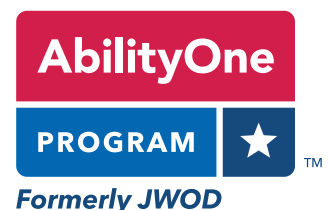
What's on the Cover ⟶ 30

How Unified Communications Benefits the Call Center
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

When your customers call, Honduras answers.

In Honduras, a growing number of U.S. companies are discovering ideal conditions for call center and back office operations. With 850,000 people between 18 and 35, Honduras has the largest young work force in the region, many of them bilingual. Low labor costs, a recently liberalized telecom industry, and a nearby location that overlaps U.S. time zones all combine to make Honduras a most attractive destination for investment in the service sector. Put Honduran hospitality on the line with your customers. For more information or a meeting, call FIDE, 1-866-588-1153, on the Web at investinhonduras.org.

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Rich Tehrani, *Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.*

Taking The Temperature Of The Hosted Enterprise App Marketplace: Salesforce.com, Google And Microsoft

Google (News - Alert) And Salesforce.com News - Alert) Enhance Relationship

It was over a year and a half ago when I had a chance to listen to Marc Benioff (News - Alert) talk about how his company's software would be integrating with Google to provide a mashup designed to allow companies to better track their Google advertising. Using the services together, organizations would be able to utilize the CRM portion of the software to track where customers came from: which ad, which keyword, which landing page, etc. The matter was so important, I made the article a High Priority! column in the September 2006 issue of this magazine (see "Salesforce.com: Leading The Way To CRM 2.0" at www.tmcnet.com/2016.1).

The two companies have decided to take the collaboration one step further and, as a result, you will now be able to purchase Google Applications via Salesforce.com, and there will be tighter integration between the two companies. For example, e-mails sent to customers via Google's mail application will be connected to customer records in Salesforce.com.

While this collaboration is great, there are still companies that worry about how to maintain security when their vital corporate data is stored on the servers of another company.

Perhaps this move will manage to make customers more comfortable with the hosted approach, as Google has a strong reputation and helps boost Salesforce.com's credibility – not that the company really needed it, but having such a large partner would help anyone.

In my opinion, there are many companies that don't want to worry about having idle employees if their broadband provider or router fails.

I have to say that I really appreciate Marc Benioff as a spokesperson for Salesforce.com because he calls them as he sees them. No longer having Tom Siebel to go after, Benioff has resorted to blasting Microsoft (News - Alert). If you want a more specific example of what I mean, consider the memo put out by Benioff in November of 2005 in which he had the following to say:

"Last month, our number one competitor surrendered, and decided to take its place beside several former competitors at software's Shady Pines Rest Home, also known as Oracle (News - Alert). It was a merciful outcome for shareholders, but a time of con"fusion" for customers."

This is what Benioff now has to say about Microsoft:

"This will make it easier for us to convince more businesses to stop buying Microsoft Office and switch to better services like this that are emerging in the cloud."

But there is more. In the past, Benioff has stated,

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend, so that makes Google my best friend."

Microsoft has proven they will not sit back and take it; in fact, it seems to me that the company thrives on the competition. In fact Brad Wilson, the company's general manager for the CRM unit, had this to say:

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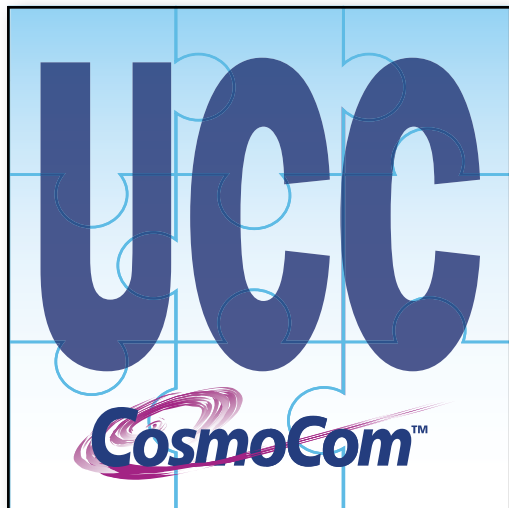
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CosmoCom™

See CosmoCom at Call Center 2.0 Booth 231 in September

Rich Tehrani, *Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.*

"Salesforce has belatedly recognized that it is important to link CRM apps to productivity tools. It has been core to our product since we launched five years ago. It validates our strategy."

But really, these comments are more icing on the cake – the fun stuff, if you will.

The real meat of this news is that Google and Salesforce.com will collaborate to make their solutions better. They will integrate more effectively and do their best to ensure they have solutions that are very competitive with those sold by not just Microsoft but every other company on the market.

In addition to the obvious synergies between the two companies, the real winner here is Google. Why? Because as this deal strengthens, Google will get an outside spokesman for their applications in Benioff. This man has proven to get under the skin of the competition and he seems to drive them crazy.

Of course, I don't want to make a mountain out of a molehill, but this sort of news could have the potential to unite more Microsoft competitors. It would be interesting to see Adobe, Apple (News - Alert) and RIM somehow get involved and say they, too, will work with Salesforce.com and Google. This may be a stretch, of course, but there seems to be momentum growing, and perhaps others will see this as a great time to join the party.

Microsoft, for its part, has a big advantage in the CRM space due to its unified communications push (see "Microsoft Pushes Into Unified Communications And Beyond" at www.tmcnet.com/2018.1) and the mindshare it has in this market. In addition, the company's close ties with Aspect (News - Alert) (see "Microsoft's Call Center Push" at www.tmcnet.com/2017.1) are a tremendous help in the CRM space – especially as it relates to contact centers.

The war has gotten a lot more interesting over the past month, and it will be very interesting to see what the next moves are for each of the various players.

Hosted Application Demand Fuels Salesforce.com

Hosted applications continue to get more press as time goes on. Similar to the e-commerce space, this market saw a slew of new entrants during the bubble times and many of these companies subsequently crashed and burned. Obviously having ASPs (application service providers…remember that term?) drop like flies was not conducive to customer uptake of these solutions. In addition, as an industry, we went from a time when the term ASP was ubiquitous to

one where VCs actually told companies to not use these banished initials.

As you might imagine, if you were an ASP in 2001 to 2003 and your financial backers told you to stop identifying the industry in which you played, you had trouble acquiring new customers. This is likely why the term ASP is now gone and we use terms like hosted, on demand and software as a service (SaaS (News - Alert)) instead. (While on the subject, note to self: short stocks of companies where the investors micromanage.)

Over time, companies have gotten more comfortable with e-commerce and the hosted model, and one of the poster children for the latter has certainly become Salesforce.com. Just making it through an ASP, tech and telecom depression speaks volumes about the company. Not to mention, a one-time competitor's predictions of doom: Tom Siebel, the much-respected brain behind Siebel Systems (News - Alert), once publicly stated that Salesforce.com wouldn't be around for long.

Salesforce.com seems to thrive as the underdog, but are they still? Salesforce.com founder Marc Benioff has told me in the past that he wants to see his company grow to a billion dollars in annual revenue. Certainly, the hosted CRM leader is no longer small, but this just means they have decided to focus on going after bigger competitors.

Of course, the alliance Salesforce.com has made with Google has focused a huge spotlight on the company. To get a handle on the future of the hosted CRM company and what the Google alliance means to customers, I traveled to downtown Manhattan where I spoke with Bruce Francis, Salesforce.com's VP of Corporate Strategy. You may recall that I last interviewed Francis in the summer of 2006 (see "Salesforce.com And Contactual (News - Alert)" at www.tmcnet.com/2019.1).

Francis was candid about the Google news. He told me that his customers want to be free of the software burden. Many of them started with hosted CRM and are now yearning for SaaS solutions to replace the rest of their in-house software as well. He continued, "It doesn't hurt that the incumbent software maker has rolled out the most disastrous upgrade to Windows ever. [referring to Microsoft Vista]. Who wants to deal with this anymore?"

From there, Francis explained how there has been a shift in the market where enterprise users used to be so far ahead of consumers in terms of their technology adoption. He sees a world now where consumers are way ahead of the business market. Now, he says, consumers have Web 2.0 and 3.0 and seem much further along than most

businesses. "Businesses are saying what gives?" he added. "Why am I using the greatest [software] hits of the mid-decade of the 20th century when my consumer life is so much better?"

He went on to explain, with much enthusiasm, that this is the opportunity his company, in conjunction with Google, is taking advantage of. From there, he discussed how much easier it is to collaborate on shared documents using hosted services.

Referring to collaborative software, he said, "Traditional vendors like Microsoft do not understand and show no potential to do so."

I did mention Microsoft's SharePoint server product as one of the ways Microsoft is addressing this matter. Francis responded, "It is one of those products that millions have but thousands use and no one loves."

In the past, I have heard some negative comments on SharePoint and I didn't really have a list of happy (or unhappy, for that matter) customers to bring up during the interview. I have been meaning to test the SharePoint out at TMC and hope to do so in the future. It is worth mentioning that after the interview, I did do some digging and was able to pull up a number of positive comments regarding the latest version of SharePoint. Coincidently I have also been informally testing some of the hosted services Microsoft offers via its Live initiative.

I believe the problem for Microsoft is a lack of a clear SaaS strategy and, moreover, a concise market explanation. They have a number of hosted and collaborative initiatives, but if it is tough for me to rattle them off, one wonders what customers need to do to keep up.

But getting back to SalesForce, I asked Francis what will come of the Google collaboration. He responded, "I don't know." Those who know me well know it is challenging to make me speechless. But sure enough, in this instance, I wasn't sure how to respond. I told Francis this was not the answer I expected.

He said it isn't him or anyone in the company who necessarily directs them in how they collaborate with Google. He told me the answers I seek are at ideas.salesforce.com, the user portal for the Salesforce.com community. This is users visit to share suggestions and improvements for the company's services. This technology is not only powering the growth of Salesforce.com, but Dell (News - Alert) and Starbucks too are now taking advantage of Salesforce.com's services to ensure they, too, can get their customers to collaborate in making them better. I checked this portal out and found a great recommendation to get Salesforce.com working with Google Gears.

There were lots of other interesting ideas on the site, as well.

Francis also pointed me to companies like Astadia that built an application that integrates a quote generating service between Salesforce.com and Google applications allowing you to use Gmail to e-mail a custom quote to a customer.

From there, we discussed how the company's goal is to get as many companies as possible to use their hosted platform to develop applications. He mentioned Coda, an accounting software vendor out of Germany that decided to use the AppExchange as the basis for their hosted offering. He explained that the company is able to utilize one-third of the resources in pulling off their SaaS product as they leverage the database, logic, workflow and other features that Salesforce.com has perfected over the past nine years.

Francis emphasized that he hopes thousands of companies take advantage of their platform-as-a-service model and, moreover, that they are thrilled to allow developers in emerging markets to develop applications without the need for tremendous infrastructure they would likely never have access to.

I left enthused about what Salesforce.com is doing. They seem to have great market position, as the hosted market is exploding with growth and they are so closely tied to it. Of course, their recently enhanced relationship with Google doesn't hurt.

As always, you can never count Microsoft out, as the company thrives on competition. Their hosted solutions have been under the radar but it is not like the Redmond-based software giant doesn't have the resources to compete effectively using increased marketing and branding.

In the short term, however, Microsoft may have been very distracted with the attempted Yahoo! acquisition. During this time, I

expect Salesforce.com was working as hard (and will continue to do so) to ensure they gain as much traction as possible across the spectrum of hosted services in which they play. **CIS**

Eloqua Announces New Campaign Management Capabilities

Eloqua Corporation, a vendor of demand generation applications and expertise for business-to-business marketers, has announced new campaign management capabilities that help business-to-business marketers deploy campaigns. Campaign Composer, a campaign-planning tool designed to match how marketers approach campaign development, is designed to help marketers "engage, nurture and qualify sales leads," Eloqua officials say. It integrates with CRM and SFA systems.

www.eloqua.com

CRM Revenue To Hit $9 Billion In 2008

Worldwide customer relationship management software revenue is projected to surpass $8.9 billion in 2008, a 14.2 per cent increase from preliminary 2007 revenue estimates of $7.8 billion, according to research mavens Gartner (News - Alert), Inc. The CRM market is "poised for healthy growth through 2012," when revenue is forecast to reach $13.3 billion, Gartner says in "Customer Relationship Management Software, Worldwide 2007-2012." "The composition of the worldwide CRM market is evolving as vendors continue to extend regionally, increase penetration within existing accounts and gain new clients, offer flexible deployment models, and continue to develop the channel," said Sharon Mertz, research director at Gartner.

www.gartner.com

Commerce Planet's Iventa, Yesmail Announce E-Mail Marketing Program

Commerce Planet and its subsidiary, Iventa, which sells e-commerce management software, have announced an e-mail marketing program with Yesmail, an infoUSA (News - Alert) company. Under the terms of the agreement, Yesmail will manage and direct Iventa's e-mail marketing program. Iventa's business management software, combined with Yesmail's Enterprise e-mail marketing product expands Iventa's service offering to their enterprise customer base. The platform also includes an integrated analytics module that provides a variety of reports for operational analysis and planning.

www.commerceplanet.com

U.S. Economic Downturn Driving Growth For Hosted Contact Center Solutions Market

DMG Consulting, which sells contact center and real-time analytics research and consulting services, has published the 2008 Hosted Contact Center Infrastructure Market Report, a guide to the market, products and vendors. The firm's research found that there are more than 385,000 hosted contact center seats in use around the world today: "The projected slowdown in the U.S. economy will be a key stimulus fueling the adoption of hosted contact center products, as companies are compelled to reduce capital investments," DMG wrote.

www.dmgconsult.com

CRM Provider NetSuite, BT (News - Alert) Announce Reseller Deal

CRM vendor NetSuite has announced a partnership with BT to distribute, resell and support NetSuite in the UK and EMEA. The BT/NetSuite (News - Alert) announcement comes on the heels of NetSuite's introduction of NetSuite OneWorld, a new on-demand product that enables multi-national companies to manage their company in a single application.

In 2004, the Department of Trade and Industry estimated that there are 4.3 million business enterprises in the UK and 99.9 percent were small to medium-sized enterprises, many of whom have requirements for multi-national CRM, ERP and ecommerce capabilities. The majority of these, NetSuite officials say, "still buy separate, expensive software packages to run and manage their business."

www.netsuite.com

SAS (News - Alert) Helps Turn Business Intelligence Green

Business intelligence provider SAS announced a new "green" initiative: the company has positioned itself to better help organizations accurately measure and manage their environmental impact. SAS for Sustainability Management introduces what the company calls "the first decision-support software platform for proactively identifying innovative strategies that effectively address complex environmental, social and economic situations while achieving stakeholder objectives." SAS for Sustainability Management, based on the SAS Enterprise Intelligence Platform, uses the Global Reporting Initiative framework to report on Triple Bottom Line indicators. These indicators relate to the three spheres of sustainability – environmental, social, and economic, using SAS' predictive

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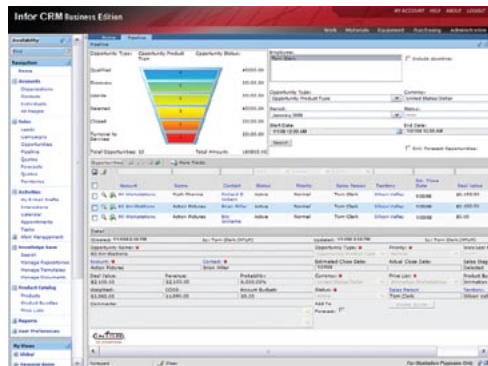
Business solutions provider Infor recently announced the availability of its Infor CRM Business Edition, a CRM software package designed to meet the specialized sales and service needs of small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs). According to the company, Infor CRM Business Edition streamlines critical CRM functions, helping sales organizations convert leads into sales and enabling service representatives to nurture customer interactions into long-term profitable relationships. Infor CRM Business Edition consists of two modules: Infor CRM Sales and Infor CRM Service. The combined solution was created to simplify configuration and reduces deployment costs. It features built-in integration to Infor ERP SyteLine and Infor ERP LN, Infor's enterprise resource planning solutions.

www.infor.com

EPA's Call Center Cited For Government Customer Support Excellence

Apptis, which provides IT solutions and services to the federal marketplace, announced that the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) call center has won the 2008 Government Customer Support (GCS) Excellence Award for its Overall Excellence. Apptis, as a subcontractor/partner to Computer Sciences (News - Alert) Corporation (CSC) on the ITS-EPA contract, is part of the team responsible for the daily operations of the EPA call center. Apptis, in partnership with CSC transitioned the EPA's legacy help desk environment and consolidated several help desks and functions into a single point of contact call center.

www.apptis.com

Study Shows Marketers Still Not Properly Using E-mail

Marketing platform provider Alterian has released the results of its free online interactive assessment measuring the level of sophistication of more than 700 marketers, agencies and marketing services providers' e-mail strategies and activities. It included an in-depth look at how marketers personalize, automate, segment, track and report on e-mail campaigns. The news was not great. (This is not a surprise to you if you are a consumer who has tried to resolve a customer issue via e-mail lately.) Based on responses to 10 multiple choice questions, Alterian scored participants and provided them with a ranking in one of the five following categories: Basic E-mail Marketer, Intermediate E-mail Marketer, Advanced User, Expert User and Pacesetter. Out of the more than 700 respondents, only five percent qualified as an Expert User (those most likely to be generating results that are significant and easily quantifiable) and none achieved the level of Pacesetter (those pushing e-mail marketing to new realms of effectiveness and relevance).

www.alterian.com

Call Genie (News - Alert) Appoints Former Telcordia President

Call Genie, which provides mobile local search and advertising solutions, recently announced the appointment of Michael Henderson as its Chief Sales Officer. Henderson, a career communications industry professional, is tasked with leading Call Genie's global sales and marketing organization and executing on the company's mission to "become the de-facto standard in delivering mobile local search and advertising solutions that enable directory assistance providers, yellow pages publishers, search engine companies and wireless carriers to launch new lines of business and create new revenue streams," according to the press release.

www.callgenie.com

ContactBabel (News - Alert) Invites U.S. Call Centers To Participate In Study

Research group ContactBabel announced this morning it has begun research for the second edition of its "U.S. Contact Center Operational Review (second edition - 2008).

The company is inviting the participation of any U.S. business that has more than 10 employees working in a telephony-based role to take part, whether inbound, outbound, sales or service-focused. Recent research indicates that U.S. businesses have reached a critical point within their customer-facing operations. The growing pressure caused by staff attrition and absence, a shrinking labor pool, the failure of offshore outsourcing and a more demanding customer base means that alternatives such as self-service and automation are now seen as viable alternatives to increasing headcount.

www.contactbabel.com

LiveOps (News - Alert) Follows Salesforce.com Model To Corporate Philanthropy

Home agent provider LiveOps has announced the creation of its new philanthropic Foundation. The LiveOps Foundation was developed with the goal of supporting activities that enhance and serve the communities in which LiveOps employees live and work, as well as the associated issues that impact quality of life. The foundation is modeled after salesforce.com's philanthropic organization and, in fact, had the support and encouragement of salesforce.com CEO Marc Benioff. Utilizing salesforce.com's 1/1/1 integrated corporate philanthropy model, LiveOps has built its Foundation on "three cornerstones of giving." LiveOps plans to set aside approximately one percent of current outstanding shares to be used to fund the Foundation after a liquidity event. In addition, LiveOps will offer gifts of cash supporting grants for organizations that their employees support, grants for business partners and a matching gift policy of up to $500 per employee per year.

CallMiner (News - Alert) Awarded U.S. Patent For Speech Analytics

Speech analytics solutions provider CallMiner has announced it has been awarded a U.S. Patent for speech analytics. CallMiner's patented software generates word alternatives to "disambiguate confusing phrases used in speech patterning," according to the company. The patent is for an element of the software that raises the efficiency and accuracy of its speech analytics solution.

www.callminer.com

CRM For Non-Profits Solution Now Includes Web Integration Platform

Open-source CRM provider MPower announced that its solution now includes a Web integration platform designed to enable users of the company's donor database to integrate easily and in real-time with Web content management systems (CMS) of their choice. Nonprofits that are the focus of MPower's solutions have not been able to easily integrate donor databases and CMS solutions from different vendors. MPower's new functionality gives organizations more options and improved flexibility for building and leveraging CRM systems that meet their specific needs. According to the company, real time, bi-directional integration of constituent data collected in offline and online databases is key for conducting the most effective marketing and fundraising campaigns. Such integration provides nonprofits with an immediate, complete view and understanding of constituents who nowadays interact with charitable groups through multiple channels, such as direct mail, television, radio, online, telephone, events, personal contact, newsletters and subscriptions.

www.mpoweropen.com

SugarCRM (News - Alert) Delivers Enhanced Enterprise Reporting And Wireless Features
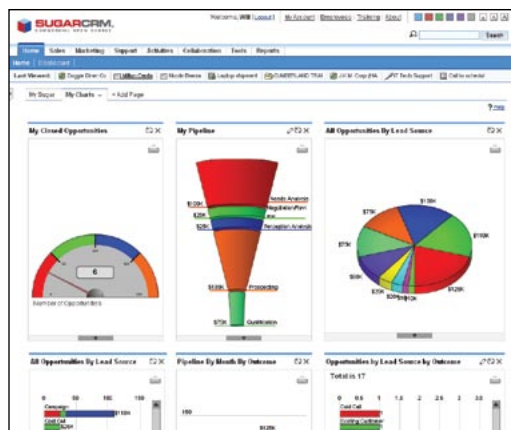
Open source CRM provider, SugarCRM has announced the beta release of new reporting and wireless capabilities for SugarCRM. For SugarCRM users, this means more insight into sales effectiveness and customer behavior and with new wireless capabilities, a feature-rich SugarCRM user experience on mobile phones, including BlackBerry (News - Alert) and iPhone mobile handsets. As part of the new enhancements, SugarCRM has said it also "strengthened data import features, enhanced the ability to create custom objects and modules with Sugar Module Builder, and introduced new tracking functionality which allows SugarCRM administrators to get a better view into system usage and performance."

www.sugarcrm.com

TouchStar (News - Alert) Intros Call Center System Guaranteed to Reduce Costs
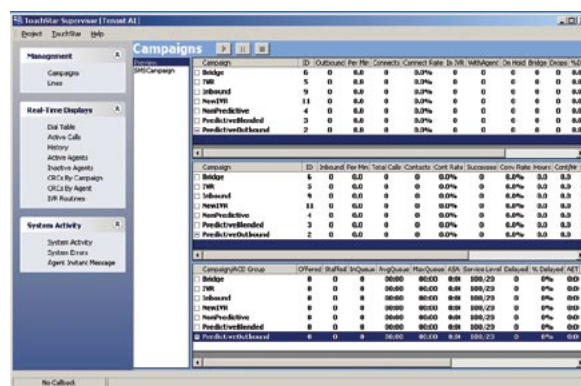
Call center solutions provider TouchStar has announced its Enterprise Call Center System now provides enterprise clients with rapidly reduced costs. The newly enhanced system, complete with support for NMS Communications Open Access carrier class media processing platform, also includes new load balancing and a multi-threaded software architecture to assist enterprise call centers in attaining scalability and reliability with their call center system. TouchStar can now also scale to support thousands of call center agents anywhere in the world on a variety of networks.

www.touchstar.com

Over-the-Phone Language Interpreter Workforce Continues Growth

The increasing need for over the phone interpretation and bilingual translation especially with call center and customer care transactions between companies and limited English speakers, is resulting in a greater demand for the interpreter workforce. Realizing this demand, Language Line Services (LLS), a provider of language-based services, has announced it plans to increase its Monterey, California and Elk Grove, Illinois-based interpreter workforce. Language Line Services provides phone interpretation for hospitals, courts and 911 call centers in the U.S., Canada and the U.K.

www.languageline.com

Survey Finds Web Meetings Are Increasing, Companies Getting Greener

As the focus on "Going Green" increases in today's workplace, the latest survey by unified communication services provider, Genesys (News - Alert) reveals that companies have become much greener in the last year. According to the latest survey, travel is down and virtual meetings are up as companies increase their attention on Green behaviors. The Genesys "Earth Day Green Survey" looked to more than 18,000 customers to reveal how behaviors are changing in the workplace to address environmental concerns. According to the survey's findings, 56 percent of respondents recognized meaningful steps within their company to become Greener since the last Earth Day.

www.genesyslab.com

Survey Says 87 Percent Question Safety Of Personal Info

Despite placing the security of their personal information as a top priority, many U.S. adults are unwittingly engaging in everyday activities that could put their privacy in jeopardy, according to a new study. Such risky behaviors include providing personal information to a Web site without reviewing its privacy policy, according to the nationwide survey, conducted by Harris Interactive (News - Alert). The survey was commissioned by ProQuo, Inc. The study, done in March, reveals that 83 percent of adults agree that ensuring the security of their personal information is a top priority, 77 percent believe they know how to protect their personal information, while about half – or 51 percent – believe they are at low risk for their information to be used without permission.

www.proquo.com

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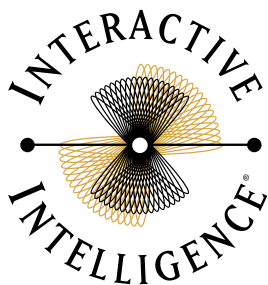
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CRM Incorporated Into Mobile Marketing, New Media Institute Says

Major U.S. brands have incorporated mobile marketing into CRM as well as their traditional advertising campaigns and call centers in order to "increase response, enhance loyalty and improve customer relations," according to the New Media Institute. "Most people today use a cell phone. Lack of cell phone spam translates into a major channel of communications without the noise of traditional channels," explained John Spagnuolo, President of the New Media Institute. The NMI is offering tips for mobile marketers, including the suggestion to "offer an incentive for individuals to opt-in to your mobile community," and segmenting your message: "This is not a new concept for marketers, but mobile technology makes executing this task easy."

www.newmedia.org

Apatar Phone Verify Tool Released For Sugar-CRM, Salesforce, Other Apps
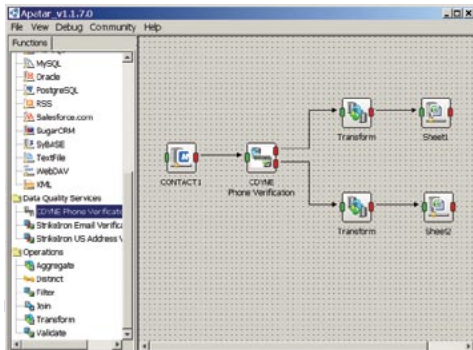
Apatar, a vendor of open source data integration software, has announced the CDYNE Phone Verification connector for the Apatar Open Source Data Integration toolset, which works for SugarCRM, Salesforce.com and other applications. The new connector determines the validity of any U.S. or Canadian phone number using CDYNE Web services, all without coding. Now Apatar lets users verify and filter customer phone numbers extracted from databases, files, applications (Salesforce.com, SugarCRM) and Web 2.0 destinations such as "Flickr, Amazon S3, RSS feeds," the Apatarians say. Over half of B2B marketers plan to put more resources against creating marketing databases, cleaning up customer data, improving sales force automation and CRM integration, according to Forrester (News - Alert) Research in its "B2B CMO Investment Priorities for 2008" report.

www.apatar.com

DirectMail.com Acquires HP Indigo Technology To Enhance Customer Messaging

DirectMail.com, a direct mail and data services provider, has successfully acquired Hewlett Packard's HP Indigo technology for creating dynamic, high-quality customer messaging. With this acquisition, DirectMail.com will be better positioned to maximize on HP's digital printing technology and produce messaging that is completely dynamic and data driven, with the quality inherent in traditional offset printing.

www.directmail.com

Verint (News - Alert) Witness Actionable Solutions Validated Through Gvalidated Application Integration

Verint Systems Inc. has announced that the quality monitoring and recording solutions from its Verint Witness Actionable Solutions business line has been validated through the Gvalidated Application Integration initiative by Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories Inc. A company must be accepted into the Genesys validation initiative as well as have successfully developed and deployed its integration according to Genesys design standards to achieve this designation. Gvalidated is the highest status for a non-Genesys developed integration. Verint Witness Actionable Solutions' quality monitoring and recording solution is designed to help contact centers and enterprises increase operational effectiveness, reduce liability and enhance the overall customer experience.

www.verint.com

Talisma Click To Call Now Available To Improve Customer Service

Talisma Corporation (News - Alert), a customer interaction management (CIM) software solution provider, has announced the release of Talisma Click to Call, a product designed to enable seamless escalation from Web to phone. The Talisma Click to Call solution delivers benefit to both sales support and customer service as it increases the quality of the customer experience and the efficiency of the contact center. Consumers visiting a Web site can use Talisma Click to Call to request an immediate call from an agent or they can schedule a call back at a specific time. This service option enables consumers to avoid navigating tedious phone menu options and waiting on hold to speak with an agent.

www.talisma.com

Nuance (News - Alert) Partners with Genesys to Integrate Voice for On Demand

Nuance Communications has announced a partnership with Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories to integrate the Genesys Voice Platform (GVP) into Nuance's On Demand Network. This relationship will enable enterprises to gain access to GVP in a highly scalable and reliable hosted call center solution that enables their consumers to effortlessly get help, make purchases and save time. As part of the joint agreement, Nuance will combine the power of the Nuance On Demand carrier-grade VoiceXML (News - Alert) hosting network with Genesys Voice Platform as one of its preferred partners for delivering state-of-the-art self service interactions in a secure hosted environment.

www.nuance.com

Motorola's (News - Alert) ECare 5.2 CRM-Integrated Customer Care Product Released
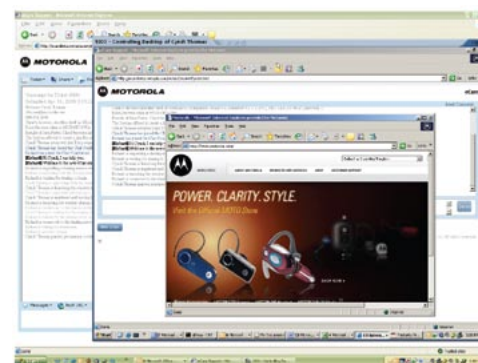
Motorola has announced a new version of its eCare customer support application, according to company officials "adding versatility and secure functionality to improve the quality and efficiency of Web-based call center resolution." The vendor's flagship customer care tool for remote management and control of the desktop, eCare 5.2 adds Managed Scripts to enable network device and operating system interaction and beyond. The product can help users "reduce call times by an average of more than 60 percent," said Alan Lefkof, corporate vice president and general manager, Motorola Broadband Solutions Group: "The new Managed Scripts component allows for issues to be solved even faster and more effectively."

www.motorola.com

www.tmcnet.com/2008.1

FrontRange Solutions (News - Alert) Acquires Centennial Software

FrontRange Solutions has announced the acquisition of Centennial Software, a dynamic infrastructure management products provider. Centennial, which is focused on auto-discovery and inventory management and license management solutions, offers solutions that provide greater regulation, best practice standards and the economic downturn that drives the need for greater control of IT assets and operations. As such, the company's solutions help customers to achieve reductions in cost, complexity and risk.

www.frontrange.com

www.tmcnet.com/2011.1

Customer Feedback Management from Interactive Intelligence (News - Alert)

Interactive Intelligence announced a series of products designed to help organizations better measure and improve customer service by listening to the voice of the customer. The first of the customer feedback management products being introduced is Interaction Feedback — an automated customer satisfaction survey module that enables organizations to accurately measure customer service levels in a timely and cost-effective way. The new automated interaction survey module runs on Interactive's Interaction Center Platform, and the company has partnered with several leading customer survey organizations for surveys and library of questions and a template to make sure that the collected information is relevant.

www.inin.com

www.tmcnet.com/2009.1

Egypt Gaining Ground As Global Contact Center Competitor

According to Frost & Sullivan research, Egypt is a rising star of a contact center offshore destination. Comparative analysis has proven that it has good potential to become a location of choice for European companies, as well as an interesting alternative for companies based in the U.S. Over the past five years, Egypt's GDP has been growing and inflation has remained at stable levels. The country's telecommunications infrastructure is very well developed, and the international long-distance rates have been lowered in order to promote the contact center industry.

www.frost.com

www.tmcnet.com/2010.1

Cisco (News - Alert) And Microsoft Vying for Domination Of Unified Communications Market

While neither company may want to openly admit the other is fierce competition, Cisco and Microsoft are both vying for domination of the unified communications market. Considering the growth and opportunities within this market, this position is worth the fight. A new study by analyst firm Infonetics Research (News - Alert) shows the two companies are locked in a battle of the titans for the unified communications market. Both Cisco and Microsoft are currently favored by buyers as Unified Messaging and Communicator suppliers. Avaya (News - Alert) and Nortel are also faring well as current UC suppliers.

www.infonetics.com

www.tmcnet.com/2012.1

Dragon NaturallySpeaking Contest Announced By Nuance

Nuance Communications, a provider of speech and imaging solutions, has announced the "I Speak Dragon" contest. This competition allows Dragon NaturallySpeaking users to share their unique experiences using the world's most popular speech recognition solution. Customers are invited to submit their stories about how Dragon has enhanced and transformed their lives via the Nuance website between April 24 and June 30, 2008. Three winning user stories will be selected and each will receive a Garmin (News - Alert) Nuvi 360 Personal Travel Assistant as well as Dragon NaturallySpeaking upgrades for three years.

www.nuance.com

www.tmcnet.com/2013.1

Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online Now Generally Available

Microsoft has announced the general availability of Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online. The company's hosted and managed on-demand customer relationship management service delivers a full suite of marketing, sales and service capabilities through a Web browser or directly into Microsoft Office and Outlook. This multitenant CRM solution will be hosted in Microsoft's own data centers. And, while it has really not been a secret, it is still an important milestone as it changes the game within the market. The software giant could effectively shift the price-to-value equation in on-demand CRM. With this launch, CRM is now offered in three very distinct ways, each with identical code: traditional on-premise; by subscription from a Microsoft hosting partner; and by subscription directly from Microsoft.

www.microsoft.com/dynamics/crm

www.tmcnet.com/2014.1

TuVox (News - Alert) To Support Intelligent Customer Front Door

TuVox , a provider of On Demand speech applications, has become one of the first major partners to support the intelligent Customer Front Door (iCFD), a key solutions bundle from Genesys, an Alcatel-Lucent (News - Alert) company. iCFD was introduced in early April and is positioned as a unique solution set that combines Genesys Dynamic Contact Center components with advanced self-service applications to transform the experience for customers that enter the "telephone front door" of an organization. TuVox has added the most significant applications wave for the solution to date.

www.tuvox.com

www.tmcnet.com/2015.1

Siemens Intros OpenScape Contact Centre

Siemens Enterprise Communications has (News - Alert) introduced the OpenScape Contact Centre, a complete voice, unified communications and customer interaction software solution designed to work with any existing telephony environment. OpenScape is based on Siemens' innovative new unified communications software foundation, OpenScape Unified Communications (News - Alert) (UC) Server, which removes the artificial legacy barriers between today's traditionally separate voice, video and unified communications systems. The result is a comprehensive suite of UC applications. This new offering from Siemens (News - Alert) builds on the presence-enabled HiPath ProCentre Enterprise contact center application to provide a platform to enhance customer interactions across every segment of an enterprise, on virtually any existing communications or network infrastructure.

www.enterprise-communications.siemens.com

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

CRM Comes To You: SAP And RIM Announce Expanded Partnership

S AP (News - Alert) and Research in Motion recently announced an agreement that should prove to be very welcome to companies looking to meet the needs of mobile sales professionals. The announcement, issued during a joint press conference at SAP's Manhattan offices in May, was made by Bob Stutz, Executive Vice President and General manager, Industries and CRM, of SAP; Bill McDermott, President and CEO, SAP Americas (News - Alert); and Jim Balsillie, CEO and Chairman of RIM.

Bill McDermott started the conference by holding up his BlackBerry. "Everyone I know is addicted to this device, including myself," he said. The truth was in the reaction of the audience, which collectively murmured and smiled. "Who wakes up to this device using the alarm function?" asked McDermott. Many hands went up.

The relationship between the two companies, of course, is not brand new. For starters, the two companies have been clients of one another (users of one another's solutions) for years. During the previous several years, a sales professional could access SAP CRM on his or her BlackBerry. There was, however, no native integration.

That is about to change, said McDermott. "CRM is now natively integrated onto the BlackBerry device itself, which changes the game. What that means is that sales users, for example, will automatically be fed their leads when they log in to view their reports or their calendars. They are doing it within the confines of the BlackBerry itself. What RIM and SAP are now committed to doing is natively integrating the entire business suite of SAP onto the BlackBerry device," revealed McDermott.

Company executives highlighted the importance – and the potential – of the announcement by citing analyst statistics. According to IDC (News - Alert), there are 800 million mobile professionals in the world today, and that number is expected to grow to one billion by 2010. This announcement will certainly be good news to a large portion of them.

Said McDermott, "SAP, the world leader in enterprise applications, and RIM, the world leader in enterprise communications, have converged the world of applications and the world of mobility on the BlackBerry device. Applications, business processes and productivity are now on your hip. You can compete and win in the marketplace."

Organizations that already have the SAP CRM and the BlackBerry solutions deployed will require only basic user training and minimal incremental IT infrastructure investments.

Said Jim Balsillie, Co-CEO and Chairman of RIM, "The word is 'native.'" He addressed the difference between the previous integration with SAP and today's announcement, underscoring the native integration. The change is that the former relationship was "session pull," which meant users had a laborious connection and log-in process to initiate sessions (and the data exchange was not exactly "real time"). Today's announcement has turned the process to "session-less push to your belt." Basically, a user can wake up in the morning, pick up his or her BlackBerry, and within a few clicks, be in the middle of SAP CRM in real-time. "Why didn't we do it natively earlier?" asked Balsillie rhetorically. "We had to develop the APIs. And this is just the right time for it."

Balsillie spoke of the spirit of cooperation between the two companies and how much he values RIM's relationship with SAP. Every aspect of crafting the partnership was about, he said, "How do we provide value to customers? Of course you care about sales, but it starts with integrity and it starts with a value proposition."

According to the executives of both companies, the existing overlap of customers is "almost perfect."

The next executive to comment on the announcement was Bob Stutz, Executive Vice President and General Manager, Industries and CRM, for SAP. He indicated that the partnership was very natural. "We're the leader in enterprise applications, and RIM is the leader in enterprise connectivity," said Stutz. "We sat down and said, 'How can we do something?' We're living in a digital age. People need to have access to information real-time on their device. We went to RIM and said, 'We understand applications, we really don't understand this connectivity piece. What we really want to do is build a native CRM application on a BlackBerry. We don't want to do it, we want you to do it.' CRM is so powerful, but only if users have universal access to their data. Prior to this, that vision had not yet been achieved in CRM."

SAP's CRM application was the lucky first for the partnership. More pieces of SAP's business suite are to follow, as the partnership will be extended to other applications in the full business suite. Eventually, every SAP application will be running natively on a BlackBerry. "CRM is just the start here," said Stutz. "We will continue to build this out: ERP supply chain, industry applications."

An SAP engineer demonstrated the application for the audience on his BlackBerry. "With just a few clicks, you can be into your calendar items for the day. CRM comes to me, I don't have to go to it."

As it turns out, SAP is its own beta customer with the solution. And not long after the announcement, they had an opportunity to test the partnership. "At SAPPHIRE next week, where we'll have 15,000 of our closest friends, we'll look to feature this in a big way," said Bill McDermott. General availability was stated to be "imminent…within a few months."

At the question and answer portion of the conference, a question came from an audience member with regards to availability and the highly publicized BlackBerry outage of last year. "What happens," queried the audience member, "If there is a network problem with BlackBerry like there was last year?"

Balsillie stepped up to answer, indicating that RIM takes that issue very seriously. "There has been an absolute tremendous expansion [since then]," he said. "We take the need for absolute total availability and we take our responsibility very seriously. We have had brief outages where packets were lost. Was there any security corruption? No. Was any information lost? No. Have measures been taken to prevent that in the future? Yes. We're not perfect, but we aspire to perfection. When things happen, we immediately go to system integrity that no security is corrupted, no packets are lost. Words can't explain how seriously important this is to us."

McDermott turned the focus to the importance of CRM to an organization. (I think it's very telling that SAP chose to launch their CRM module first rather than others they could have chosen.) "Why has the promise of CRM, to some extent, not be fulfilled?" he asked. "Because the sales force is mobile. They don't want to be tethered to a desk entering data. They want to be out on the street selling something to someone."

And they want their CRM to come to them, not the other way around. **CIS**

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

Say What You Want And Get It: A Q&A With Tellme

S ay what you want it get it," is the message on Tellme's (News - Alert) Web site. It's hard to get more succinct than that. The company also states that more than 40 million people use Tellme every month to reach the people, businesses and information they need on the phone and on the go. I recently got a chance to catch up with Jamie Bertasi, who heads up the Business Solutions division of Tellme. (In other words, I said what I wanted to know, and she got me the information.)

TS: When you say Tellme is the "world's largest VXML platform," what do you mean? How is that measured?

JB: We have created the largest voice platform used by millions of people every day. There are over 3,000 applications running on the Tellme platform for everything from directory assistance to customer service. Our platform not only has the most VoiceXML applications running on it but also receives the most phone calls of any voice platform in the world. The sheer volume of calls allows us to process a huge amount of data on how people interact with voice services in order to continually improve the overall performance and experience. This means our platform recognizes a greater variety of voices, so applications perform better.

TS: How easy is the solution to personalize and customize for each company?

JB: Personalization and customization are built in. Businesses on the Tellme platform have multiple voices and languages to choose from to be the "voice" of their company. For each voice, we have millions of recorded audio prompts and specialized libraries. In addition, our patented concatenation techniques create natural-sounding sentences. Too often, with other systems, you hear half of a sentence in one voice or intonation, and the other half uses another voice or even a different volume level. That's like the Frankenstein of audio, and it makes callers really impatient. When callers contact businesses powered on our platform they hear natural-sounding audio, whether the application is confirming a pizza order or reporting an account balance.

Again, drawing on our close understanding of the top reasons for calls, Tellme is able to leverage our clients' web data to deliver a more personalized experience for the caller. For example, when we worked with American Airlines on their "Remember Me" campaign, research indicated the top reason people were calling customer service was to confirm the status of their flight. Tellme and American Airlines developed a personalization service that recognizes a customer's phone number. Say the caller has a flight later that day, the system will welcome the caller by name and automatically tap into the internet letting him know the flight departure time and gate before offering the main menu options.

Customization is so easy that Tellme clients can update voice prompts, record an emergency message, or change call transfer options on the fly without having to edit or redeploy code.

TS: Are users showing a preference for voice navigation through IVRs rather than touch-tone navigation, which is, let's face it, the butt of a lot of jokes? Why do you think customers seem to respond better to voice navigation?

JB: Voice is the natural user interface for the phone.

However, the Tellme solution offers a much richer experience for callers. Our Voice User Interface (VUI) experts are very aware that there are times when voice may not be the most desirable interface, such as when providing a Social Security number. So, we support a touch-tone interface for all applications as a backup. Because of our experience, we have also been able to design a system that is intuitive and allows the customer to get to what he wants when he wants it.

This not only results in an improved experience for the caller but can also increase revenue for the enterprise. For example, one client's trade volume increased 18 percent with a redesign of their IVR based on Tellme best practices.

TS: Can you give us an example of these best practices?

JB: It's important to look at the caller's needs. Rather than design a static tree of menus that require a user to listen to long lists of options every time, we encourage clients to deliver a proactive menu providing the caller with information he is most likely to want. The American Airlines application I mentioned earlier is a good example.

Menus should be personalized, too. Instead of presenting the same menu to every caller every time, menus should be adapted to their current needs. This delights callers. Take a healthcare company; simply bringing relevant options to the forefront of the main menu during open enrollment season can make a huge difference in the response among callers.

TS: What are the most important factors that go into achieving ROI on a solution of this type? Where are the most obvious savings?

JB: Great question, and one we get asked a lot by new clients. Clearly, the higher the level of self-service, the greater the savings. But the ROI also stems from numerous other issues, such as the system's design and the flexibility with which it can be deployed.

Tellme provides a complete solution for building, executing, managing, and enriching voice applications. We offer a solution that can help ensure voice applications contribute to business goals, delight callers, and reduce the cost of doing business.

TS: Thanks for your time, Jamie. **CIS**

For more information about Tellme, visit www.tellme.com.

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The Real Life Of CRM: Politics, Health Care, E-Mail And Coffee Shops

Where the customer relationship management rubber hits the road has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with those techie toys most people confuse with "CRM." Here are four instances of real CRM either winning or losing customers, and you don't need anything more than an off-the-shelf laptop for any of them:

E-mail Failure

Companies are getting slack and lazy about answering your customer service e-mails -- when they get around to it at all. From Chiropractic Economics:

According to an annual survey conducted by Hornstein Associates, a marketing company, customer service via e-mail has declined steadily since 2002.

In this year's survey of 49 companies, including Microsoft, GE, Toyota, Coca-Cola, IBM (News - Alert), Wal-Mart, P&G, Apple, J&J, Costco, FedEx, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Berkshire Hathaway, only 33 percent of companies responded to e-mails within 24 hours, down from a high of 63 percent in 2002.

The 2007 survey is sent to more than 49 companies. Each company has been sent the following one sentence e-mail for the past seven years:

"What is your corporate policy regarding the turnaround time for e-mails addressed to customer service?"

Only 51 percent of companies responded in any time period.

Doing It Right

Some companies do listen to customers' ideas – and act on them:

MyStarbucksIdea.com was launched a month or so ago to collect ideas from people on how Starbucks can improve service, products, profits. "So far," the Associated Press reports, "Starbucks has already promised to offer free wireless Internet access in stores and rewards through its loyalty card."

Here we see the Mom and Pop coffee shops repaying Starbucks a bit. Contrary to popular perception Starbucks did not drive everyone else out of business, but did worlds of good for independent coffee shops and other coffee shop chains, as their number and quality have skyrocketed since Starbucks raised everyone's expectations for both coffee and the coffee shop experience. One coffee shop chain's location strategy is explicitly stated as "Open as close to Starbucks as you can," next door if possible.

But as wonderful as the company is, Starbucks is the proverbial corporate battleship when it comes to nimbly navigating customer expecta-

tions. The rejuvenated Mom and Pops have found ways to build loyal clienteles in the face of Starbucks – offering free Wi-fi and loyalty cards being two of them. Now that Starbucks is open to suggestion, here's hoping the Moms and Pops find new ways to attract customers and the bar for everyone gets raised yet higher.

Health Care Customers

Health care is a business, and needs to pay attention to customer service too.

"Poor service drives Americans to switch providers, or drives them away from better-qualified providers, leading to inefficiency, higher costs and lower quality of care," according to a new report, including a survey of 1,003 Americans.

The survey, produced by management consultants Katzenbach Partners and titled "The Empathy Engine: Achieving Breakthroughs in Patient Service," finds that one in four Americans has switched or considered switching doctors, hospitals or clinics because of negative experiences, according to the research. Fifty-two percent say they choose hospitals and clinics based on whether they believe employees understand their needs, only one in five say they choose based on convenience.

The study says under the right conditions healthcare providers "excel at improvising and finding small but important solutions." Texas Children's Hospital empowers its employees to solve problems on their own. They acted on their own to bring in a mechanic to fix a door when a mother and child needed privacy. Mayo Clinic staff found a way to schedule appointments more than six months in advance -- in spite of the limitations of the computer software -- by creating their own improvised system.

The study found a group of employees at NYU Medical Center "that organized their own program to create new patient service standards. They created meetings and a reward system, and exerted peer pressure -- in a nice way -- to get other employees involved."

Politics

Gary Hargens is a politician wannabe who gets it.

According to the Rapid City Journal, Gary Hargens, a Democrat, has announced his candidacy for the South Dakota Senate in District 34

promising… good customer service.

Hargens, a resident of Rapid City for 22 years, tells the newspaper that his rural upbringing in Miller, along with his experience with Black Hills tourism for the past 22 years, give him a great understanding of two of the largest industries in the state of South Dakota.

He currently works at The Journey Museum in Rapid City, and believes that "excellent customer service," in the Journal reporter's words, "is the basis for any success." This is a politician who understands what he's really being elected to do:

"In order for government to be successful, you must give all the residents of South Dakota the best customer service, regardless of their political party affiliation," he said.

Indeed. Enough of this guff about politicians being "leaders," no sensible person wants to be "led" by government, they have a name for that style of government: "fascism." For a sensible, freedom-loving person government is there to work behind the scenes to keep the rules running, fix the potholes, enforce contracts and property rights and put on a decent St. Patrick's Day parade while we "lead" our own lives.

This puts politicians in their proper place as semi-obscure, unobtrusive civil servants, with duties far more similar to the city, district and state manager for McDonald's than to those of Hugo Chavez. Properly understood, democratic representative federalism of the sort America has should be operated as a big public service organization, with elected representatives in the same position as company management undergoing job reviews every two or four years and subject to contract renewals or termination by the voters.

Generals, head coaches and private enterprise executives are leaders. Sure it's a lot more exciting and fun to be a leader than to be a county commissioner or lieutenant governor, but if politicians want genuine leadership they can get honest jobs. Otherwise they'd better understand that customer service is their real job, and that we don't want politicians to "lead" us, we want them to just take care of the day-to-day issues and leave us alone.

So vote Hargens. **CIS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS • AD INDEX

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Comparing and Justifying Workforce Management Systems

The vendor landscape for workforce management software (WFM) is thin and highly concentrated. In our recent report, "Is it Time to Invest in Workforce Management Software?" we at the PELORUS Group were able to identify only 10 sizable vendors that focused exclusively on the contact center market. Of these, the top three — Aspect, NICE/IEX (News - Alert) and Verint Witness Actionable Solutions — controlled 78 percent of the market for WFM products and services.

In general, leading vendors target the larger contact centers: about 200 agents and up. These major vendors also offer very broad product portfolios; with an offer for all or most of the applications that comprise workforce optimization. The smaller vendors tend to pick their spots; addressing the smaller call centers or becoming experts in particular business types like financial services, retail or outsourcing.

Before contacting vendors or preparing an RFP, it is essential to conduct internal and external research to clearly understand your requirements and get a good feel for what is out there to choose from.

Once you have specified your needs – both short-term and long-term – the next step is to compare vendors. You will want to consider fundamental factors like architecture, scalability, ease-of-use, compatibility with existing infrastructure and, of course, what the system actually does. It is also very important to evaluate the vendor's service and support program. Important questions to ask are listed below.

- Does the vendor listen to your ideas?
- Does the vendor proactively solicit your feedback?
- Is there a user's group or other forum for communicating suggestions?
- Do they have a formal release schedule?
- How soon can someone be there if you need them?
- Is there a customer portal where you can download documents and get answers to troubleshooting questions?
- Is training available both in person and online?
- Can the vendor help you with best practices and benchmarking?

There is also the intangible chemistry factor. Your vendor needs to be a partner in your success. Do you enjoy working with their representatives? Do you feel confident in sharing important operating information? Have you checked out their references and visited some customer sites?

The Forecast And Scheduling Engine

Workforce management systems use sophisticated algorithms to develop forecasts and schedules. These engines take into account past history patterns and known external factors to produce a "best fit" model to meet specified service level requirements. The mathematics of these models is beyond the scope of this article. However, you do want to know if the model is static or does it "learn" as it goes along, noting changes in call patterns and self-adjusting to fine-tune the results? For example, the system may learn how call volume changes during marketing campaigns. Or it may weigh recent information more heavily on the premise that what happened in the past

few weeks is more important than what happened a year ago. It is very important that you be able to input new information such as marketing campaigns, price changes, major announcements, even changing weather conditions – all of which can affect forecasts and schedules.

Regarding the design of the software, there is a definite trend toward open architecture. While this term "open" can mean different things to different people, in general it is desirable to have an architecture that is highly scalable, can readily be distributed over multiple sites and supports cost-effective integration with third-party applications and data bases.

Integration

For a price, literally any system or data base can be integrated with any workforce management system. But it's a lot faster, easier and less costly

Table 1.

Essential	Desirable	Exceptional
Scheduling	Multichannel	Schedules non-call activities like training and back-office.
History-based forecasting	Multiskill	Self-adjusting scheduling and forecasting engine
Intuitive user screens	Multisite	Considers both skills and proficiency levels
Analysis/performance management	Agent empowerment/preferences	Schedules inbound, outbound and blended environments
Scheduling and forecasting in half-hour increments	Personalized dashboards	Group/team scheduling
Intra-day scheduling tools	User-controlled forecasting engine	Scheduling and forecasting in quarter-hour increments
Alerts	"What if" scenario planning	Supports multiple languages
Real-time adherence reporting	Browser-based administration and agent access	Automated compliance
Integration with all major ACDs	Integration with ACDs as well as other applications like IVR, QM, HR and learning	Supports virtual agents

if the WFM system is designed to facilitate the process. Some systems have translation layers that accept information from various outputs then stores and unifies it for seamless real-time input to the forecast and scheduling engine. Integration with the ACD is a given. Examples of other devices and databases the workforce management may have to talk to are:

Interactive voice response (IVR)
Predictive dialer
Quality monitoring
Performance management
Learning system
E-mail response system
Chat systems
Automated fax
Campaign management software
Sales automation/CRM
Enterprise resource planning
Human resources
Payroll

Workforce management vendors often establish strong ties to ACD vendors by becoming development partners or by becoming certified on the software. The advantage to call centers is that the ACD vendor certifies that workforce management systems integrates with their call distributor and the workforce management vendor is kept abreast of design changes in the ACD which can impact the functioning of their software.

Ease Of Use

While hard to quantify, how easy a system is to use has a significant impact on the value you get out of it. Every call center has more turnover than it would like and there is never enough time to train everyone to the desired level of proficiency. User interfaces that are intuitive and even fun to use will foster self-learning. Graphical displays of complex statistical information make it easier to see trends and spot deviations against targets. Messaging is helpful. Supervisors can send and receive alerts and promptly notify agents if there time off or schedule change has been accepted, and why or why not. Ease-of-use, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Vendor demos and user references are good ways to gather information.

Features

Modern workforce management software provides dozens of special features. Table 1 summarizes and prioritizes the most common ones. Vendors differ in how the features are provided.

Making The Business Case

Businesses and a growing number of non-profits normally require a business case before approving substantial capital investments. A business case should not be confused with an ROI model. Experienced executives know

there are many ways to work the numbers to post an attractive ROI. Indeed, no department is going to submit a capital funding request that shows an unfavorable return. Management looks at the numbers and they also look behind the numbers – to see how solid the analysis is and to assess how well the proposed investment fits with the broader of goals of the organizations. These goals include cost control and revenue growth, but also customer satisfaction, customer retention and employee loyalty. The business case captures all the reasons to make an investment in WFM, of which economics is only one.

Table 2. Benefits	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year N
Labor Cost Reduction				
Reduction in FTE hours due to higher occupancy				
Use of part-time agents				
Use of home agents				
Reduction in supervisors time creating reports				
Reduction in management time spent on manual forecasting and scheduling				
Reduction in time administering time-of requests				
Reduction in overtime expenses				
Reduction in shrinkage				
Reduction in attrition				
Gain from improved productivity				
Sub-total				
Present value				
Other Financial Benefits				
Reduction in training expenses				
Reduction in network services				
Reduction in hardware and software				
Sub-total				
Present value				
Increased cash flow				
Gross margin of additional sales				
Gross margin from higher customer retention				
Depreciation (if considered)				
Sub-total				
Present value				
Expenses				
Cost of WFM administrator(s)				
Dedicated IT support				
Continuing services (unless capitalized)				
Software upgrades (if not in service contract)				
Sub-total				
Present value				
Capital costs				
WFM Software				
Additional infrastructure (servers, cabling, workstations, etc.)				
Initial services (If capitalized))				
Continuing services (if capitalized)				
Total				

According to a study conducted in 2003 by BenchmarkPortal (News - Alert), Inc., a little more than half of call center professionals surveyed said that an ROI analysis was used to justify the purchase of their workforce management system. Building the financial case requires understanding and quantifying all of the costs and financial benefits that can realistically be attributed to the investment in workforce management technology. Table 2 is a guide to the help you identify the benefits, associated expenses and initial capital.

Today's contact centers are remarkably efficient micro-businesses within the larger enterprise. Motivated people supported by sophisticated technologies are meeting multiple and often conflicting challenges in an environment of ever-growing complexity. Unfortunately, too many contact centers tend to operate as islands unto themselves, rather than reaching out to the broader organization to tout their contributions and share their applications. The old adage about the squeaky wheel getting the oil is all too true in large organizations.

Asking for investment capital is an excellent

opportunity to tell your story while pitching your case for a new or upgraded workforce management system. Given the opportunity, you should make your case in person. You can use statistics to show how well the center performs and how much more productive you can be with new technology. You can share recorded calls to demonstrate the value of the information collected each day. You can explain the costs of running a contact center as well as the financial and non-financial benefits that accrue to the enterprise. You may have to explain what workforce management software does and how it can help the contact center reduce costs and improve customer care. It is also wise to suggest ways the application can be used in other functional areas that share many of the characteristics of the contact center.

It all comes down to salesmanship and the best salesman usually closes the deal. Go ahead. Be a Tiger! **CIS**

Dick Bucci is a Senior Consultant at The PELORUS Group, an independent market research and consultancy company serving the financial services and telecommunications industries. For more information, visit www.

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

Customer Interaction Solutions' Ninth Annual CRM Excellence Awards, Part Two

For the ninth consecutive year, the editors of Customer Interaction Solutions dared readers to prove that their companies have what it takes to win the coveted CRM Excellence Award. Below is Part Two of the winners list — the companies that offer the best and the brightest customer relationship management products and services, all to the benefit of their clients. Winners were chosen on hard data: quantifiable results that convinced us, without a doubt, their clients were infinitely better off with these companies' products and services than without.

Congratulations to the winners!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the very large volume of award applications we received, the CRM Excellence Award winners were presented in two parts; Part One appeared in the May 2008 issue of Customer Interaction Solutions. More information about winning companies and their products and services may be found at www.tmcnet.com.

NCO Customer Management, Inc.
Customer Care and Technical Support Services
www.ncogroup.com

Neolane
Neolane v4 (Enterprise Marketing Platform)
www.neolane.com

NextNine
NextNine Service Automation
www.nextnine.com

NICE Systems Ltd.
NICE SmartCenter - Interaction Analytics
www.nice.com

Numara Software
Numara FootPrints
www.numarasoftware.com

OKS Ameridial
Integrated Customer Support Service
www.oksameridial.com

Pegasystems Inc.
Customer Process Manager
www.pega.com

Sage Software
Sage SalesLogix v7.2
www.sagecrmsolutions.com

Salesforce.com, Inc.
Salesforce SFA
www.salesforce.com

SAS
SAS Marketing Optimization
www.sas.com

SER Solutions, Inc.
ENSERCLE Customer Interaction
Management Suite
www.ser.com

Siemens Communications
HiPath ProCenter
www.siemensenterprise.com

Sitel
Sitel Outsourcing Services for EarthLink
and PeoplePC
www.sitel.com

Soffront Software, Inc.
CRM software
www.soffront.com

SoundBite Communications
SoundBite on-demand automated customer
contact solution
www.soundbite.com

SugarCRM
Sugar Community Edition, Sugar
Professional and Sugar Enterprise
www.sugarcrm.com

Syntellect
CIM
www.syntellect.com

TeleDirect International, Inc.
Liberation
www.tdirect.com

TeleTech Holdings, Inc.
TeleTech Performance-Based Learning
www.teletech.com

Verint Witness Actionable Intelligence
Impact 360 Workforce Optimization
www.verint.com

Verticals onDemand
VBioPharma
www.verticalsondemand.com

VOCALCOM
Hermes.Net - VoIP Call Center Technology
www.vocalcom.com/

WebEx
WebEx Support Center - Remote Support
www.webex.com

Xactly Corporation
Xactly Incent
www.xactlycorp.com

Z-Firm LLC
ShipRush
www.shiprush.com

UC In The
Contact
Center

Since 1994, Zeacom (News - Alert) solutions have improved the way businesses communicate within the contact center and throughout the entire enterprise. As a recognized industry leader, the company provides cost-effective Unified Communications solutions that make high-end functions, such as Rich Presence, Mobility and Microsoft Outlook Integration, accessible to small and medium-sized organizations - not just large corporations.

Via one software platform, ZCC brings life to legacy PBX (News - Alert) infrastructures and amps up the power of NEC, Avaya, and Cisco IP PBXs.

At the core of ZCC are Zeacom's well-established and award-winning Contact Center, Unified Messaging, and desktop telephony functionality, which can be combined to create an enterprise-wide Unified Communications solution.

Today's contact centers must consider that efficiency and productivity extends beyond their agents. Allow *every member of your organization* to deliver a higher level of customer service from their own desktop.

What surprises most SMBs is that the ZCC licensing on modules is truly affordable! Also, what is important to note, is that a single, intelligent GUI allows for quick and easy staff training. Zeacom's support is 24/7, so feel confident that someone has your back at all times. A ZCC United Contact Center has a simple IT infrastructure, less complexity for easy, enterprise-wide adoption, and therefore less drain on company resources.

The ZCC Unified Contact Center (UCC) was developed specifically for contact centers employing between 5 and 500 agents, and for SMBs with up to 2500 desktops. A ZCC modular, scalable solution has the full range of features required by even the most demanding contact center environments:

- CTI (News - Alert) functionality for Value-Based Routing or Skills-Based Routing
- Value-add features such as Blended Inbound / Outbound Calling or Callback
- Seamless integration with CRM systems and other databases
- Multimedia Queuing – phone, fax, IM or web chat
- Rich Presence for first-call resolution

Zeacom's IVR and Reporting solutions have also helped heavy call load organizations such as credit unions, banks, and medical facilities across the country. Self-service environments and Custom Reporting add to the productivity and management of agents.

ZCC's Contact Center solution will enable your organization to become more efficient and more productive, by improving communications with customers, colleagues, suppliers and business partners. Request a demo and discover an incredible way of controlling the chaos of calls, faxes, emails, web chats, voicemails … agents, customers, employees who work from home… the list goes on. **UNIFY YOUR WORLD and CONNECT AS ONE.**

*Zeacom is a supporter of Green Technology.

Communications Traffic Control

Ask about our Multimedia Queuing, Call Back, and Skills-Based Routing modules as part of your new Unified Contact Center Solution.

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NORTEL

Achieving Customer Experience 2.0

Web 2.0 — the second wave of the World Wide Web — is creating a significant shift in how businesses and customers interact via the Internet. It's customer centric, it's immersive. It invites customers to become a part of a community that is in constant conversation about their experiences with your company, and where they can be key influencers through their blogging, chatting and emailing. Because of this, the customer experience is now tablestakes in the success or failure of a business, with one bad experience proliferating through the Web like wildfire and finding its way to the desktops of many with a single click. A successful business will embrace Web 2.0 and differentiate themselves by delivering a truly exceptional customer experience — allowing customers to do business with them on their own terms, and providing quick resolution to customer inquiries. The end result is Customer Experience 2.0 — competitive differentiation in a Web 2.0 world.

Because of the impacts of Web 2.0, businesses will need to embrace change more than ever to create a business that is truly customer centric. It's a delicate balance to remain efficient and effective while traveling the road to achieving Customer Experience 2.0. To remain relevant in a Web 2.0 world, businesses must incorporate various methods of customer contact (e-mail, phone, IM, text/chat, video, etc.) to leverage their company's wealth of resources to better serve the customer and create a memorable experience. Using Unified Communications, customer service representatives can rally employee resources to the aid of the customer using presence to identify available experts. This is a significant shift from the call center of the past — moving to become a business that is completely customer focused. To drive incremental business from your customer service strategy, the entire business must become customer centric — not just the contact center. It's about breaking down the barriers between the customer and the business, exposing the core business assets in order to better serve the customer.

Nortel Experience — The help you need to achieve Customer Experience 2.0

Nortel has the experience to help businesses continue to thrive and offer differentiation in a Web 2.0 world. We understand the customer contact solutions market better than any other, with more than 60,000 contact centers and over 9,000 self-service solutions sold globally. With market accolades in Unified Communications, Contact Center and Self-service and Speech, Nortel multimedia applications are deployed at 87 of the Fortune 100 businesses. Nortel offers a variety of services and a wide ecosystem of partners to help businesses achieve their Customer Experience 2.0 goals.

For more information, visit www.nortel.com/customercontact

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www.nortel.com/customercontact

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

How Unified Communications Benefits The Call Center

The concept of "presence," which is central to unified communications, is not new to the call center, of course. In days past, it was referred to as "agent state." Because of this, one might reasonably say that a rudimentary form of unified communications was actually born in the call center. Today's UC technologies, however, have the potential to turn the whole concept of "call center" on its ear. As many companies are pulling away from the concept of one large call center facility — either out of necessity or choice — many are turning to unified communications to build a call center entity that looks very different than it did just a few years ago.

In the simplest explanation possible for what is a notoriously complex and often poorly defined subject, unified communications is the successful blending (or "convergence") of all communications media, methods and devices into one interconnected entity, if you will, that breaks away all barriers to communication within an enterprise. Unified communications, when utilized in the contact center, leads to better and faster customer service; a more satisfying and seamless customer experience; better utilization of business processes; a greater likelihood of first-call resolution and more efficient usage of a company's human capital (no more wasted hours of "phone tag (News - Alert)," for starters).

By applying the tried-and-true formula of multiplying the seconds…or even minutes…unified communications can shave off customer contacts following a first-call resolution model by the number of calls made per day, it's easy to see that unified communications can save a large call center (or even a not-so-large call center) a great deal of money in real dollars. Factor in the "soft" costs like greater customer loyalty, improved agent job satisfaction and lower turnover, and unified communications can very well be considered the backbone of a successful customer-facing company.

Unified communications allows the concept of "outside the contact center" to disappear entirely. When the same communications protocol wraps around the entire organization, the very concept of "outside" disappears, taking with it long hold times, dropped calls, busy signals, dead ends, unbalanced queues, misrouted calls and voice mail hell. It turns an organization's customer-facing infrastructure transparent, consistent and reliable. In an era of rising customer expectations in terms of quality and speed of service, and increasingly tight budgets, pleasing everyone within and without a company seemed like an impossible feat.

For a more in-depth look at the state of unified communications in the contact center, we've reached out to UC marketplace leaders for their vision of how UC can revolutionize call center operations.

Aspect Software (www.aspect.com)

Mike Sheridan, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Marketing

Many companies are thinking about unified communications (UC) and some are already in the midst of executing on UC strategies, but most of these efforts are focused on improving employee productivity. While this has merit in its own right, it is a narrow way to look at what UC can do for the business. UC, done right, has the potential to make an enormous impact on much more than internal productivity – it can transform the way you interact with your customers and really lift your bottom line.

For example, according to new research, 10.3 percent of daily interactions that originate in the contact centers require assistance from experts outside the contact center. The study, conducted by research firm Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC, found that each of those inquiries requires two interactions to fully resolve a customer's issue and last approximately two-and-half minutes longer than a call that is handled within the confines of the contact center. That means that in a 200-seat center, for example, every agent is reaching out to an expert in the enterprise once an hour. When you do the math on that, with each issue taking two interactions and two-and-a-half more minutes to resolve, you are looking at a lot of room for improvement in terms of talk time, agent productivity and first-call resolution.

UC is a viable way for every customer-facing process to be drastically improved. Instead of frantically running down a call list to reach someone with the technical expertise to answer a specific customer question, UC empowers agents to check the availability of experts in real time and quickly get their input with a few keystrokes and the click of a mouse.

Unified communications technologies can even be applied inside the contact center. Past concerns with instant messaging (IM) security, lack of reporting and indiscriminate presence broadcasting are being addressed so that colleagues and coaches can be leveraged to collaborate on customer service, sales and collections interactions.

Importantly, companies need to consider the impact that comes from bringing the knowledge worker and additional contact center employees into the customer interaction equation, such as scheduling those workers to enable them to continue to do their "day jobs," as well as ensure the quality of those customer interactions through recording and training. Performance optimization capabilities — workforce management, call recording and monitoring, and measuring key performance indicators — can be applied to calls routed to knowledge experts to ensure quality and consistency.

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By streamlining customer-facing processes, companies can make experts more easily accessible to agents when appropriate and accelerate responsiveness to customer needs. A successful UC for the contact center strategy translates into a higher proportion of exceptional interactions which means better business results.

Avaya (www.avaya.com)

Vickie McGovern, Vice President, Global Customer Service & CEBP Solutions

There are several benefits to using unified communications in the contact center. Most significantly for purposes of customer satisfaction is the increased ability to drive first-call resolution. For example, agents can see the presence status of subject matter experts — either individually or particular skill groups — and either contact them with an instant message, conference them into the customer conversation or transfer the call. If the person is moderately to highly mobile, unified communications gives them one number through which an agent can reach them on any device they're using wherever their location.

On the incoming call/message side, customer satisfaction can depend on how informed agents are about past interactions and transactions — even though the customer may use a variety of ways to communicate about a particular issue. They want consistently good experiences regardless of how they decide to contact the company — Web chat, e-mail, phone call, etc. Unifying incoming communications means that advanced routing strategies can be applied to all messages, which can be consistently handled by the agents with which the customer may be familiar; who can also respond in the method the customer is using at any given time. With unified communications in a contact center, a consolidated record is kept of customer interactions that provides the total view of the customer relationship. With the addition of video, companies can better build trust and personalize the customer experience.

Finally, unified communications enables home-based agents to be as effective as those in the office and provides a "green" approach to staffing. Use of videoconferencing also supports training and cooperation among agents that are part of a team.

CosmoCom (News - Alert) (www.cosmocom.com)

Steve Kowarsky, Executive Vice President

"Unified communications" is a very broad term related to the current revolution in communication technology. A specialized subset of this term is "unified customer communications," which is unified communications in the call center. The disruptive technology VOIP and the convergence of voice and data networks into one IP network are changing the ways we will all communicate, and especially the ways we will communicate with our customers.

Unified communications is about unifying all communication channels at the personal and organizational levels to communicate more effectively. It refers to the unification of all the forms of voice communication, such as fixed and mobile phones, video, chat, e-mail, voice mail, fax, SMS and collaboration tools such as conferencing and screen sharing. It also implies unifying the communication channel itself with other information, such as caller identity, caller state or presence, caller location, etc.

Unified customer communications is about systematically offering unified communications to an organization's customers, so that they may interact with it more effectively and efficiently, creating customer satisfaction and loyalty, growing revenue and reducing costs. Unified customer communications includes unified communications, plus facilities such as automatic call distribution, queuing, self help IVR and IVVR (interactive voice and video response), unified recording (recording of all the channels), unified reporting and unified management and supervision — all focused on the customer.

But it's really much more about the process than the technology. Unified customer communications is unifying and streamlining the business process across all communication channels and across all locations, all the way to the individual employee. Implementing it unifies the organization's workforce, goes beyond the boundaries of the call center to create informal call centers or, in other words, a true virtual call center. Every employee can and should be part of this "unified customer service" process.

Finally, it's about a unified customer experience, in which customers can select any communication channel and receive the same

quality of service, supported by the same process, by people with access to the same information, including the history of previous communication sessions with that customer via any and all channels.

Interactive Intelligence Inc. (www.inin.com)

Tim Passios (News - Alert), Director of Product Marketing

Most contact center managers don't need to be told that many of the so-called "new" applications that define unified communications (UC) have actually been around for nearly a decade. That's because these applications actually originated in the contact center. Many contact center managers have been using applications like presence management, conferencing, e-mail routing and Web collaboration for years.

What's new, however, is the use of these applications by the contact center to take better advantage of enterprise-wide resources for both increased productivity and improved customer service.

A good example of this is how contact centers are expanding the use of presence management. Increasingly contact centers are using presence management to reach knowledge experts throughout the enterprise and across distributed sites. By knowing, in real-time, exactly which experts are available and when, agents can improve first-call resolution and enhance customer satisfaction.

This same strategy can be used with instant messaging (IM) or internal Web chat. Contact center agents can initiate an IM session while on a customer call to reach knowledge experts, field technicians and sales personnel in order to more quickly address questions and issues.

While extremely beneficial to the contact center, the use of UC to improve enterprise-wide collaboration is just the beginning. The real power of UC — and the next stage in its evolution — is the foundation it provides for business process automation.

Many contact centers are already familiar with the use of multi-channel queue management services to route "objects" such as trouble tickets. UC lays the foundation to extend those services into the enterprise. So, similar to routing a call or e-mail to an agent, these same services can be used to route an insurance claim, university application,

or sales lead to the appropriate employees in assembly-line-like fashion. Importantly, this can now be done while applying the same queuing methods, alerts and tracking mechanisms along the way so service levels previously only guaranteed by the contact center, can now be guaranteed throughout the enterprise.

This next phase in the evolution of UC promises benefits beyond the type of soft ROI that comes from improved collaboration. It offers savvy contact centers the ability to demonstrate hard ROI, while further improving customer service. With the need to cut costs and retain customers more important than ever in today's tight economy, contact centers are in a prime position to realize the full potential of UC and, in the process, elevate their status to trusted advisors within the C-suite.

Spanlink (News - Alert) (www.spanlink.com)
Brett Shockley, CEO

Breaking Down The Silos
The great thing about unified communications, and what makes the technology revolutionary, is that it breaks down silos within an organization. Often times, departments within organizations, such as accounting, sales, and even the contact center, act as completely separate business units. With UC technologies, however, the walls that divide these departments can come down.

For example, let's say a contact center agent receives a call from a customer regarding a billing error and she is not able to address the customer's question. Rather than asking the customer to hold or transferring him to the accounting department without knowing whether someone is available and able to answer the customer's question, with presence, chat and collaboration, the agent can see who within the accounting department is considered the "expert" with regards to billing questions and that expert's availability status. From there, the agent can instant message the accounting representative, pull the representative into the call or transfer the customer's call.

By combining the resources of an organization's formal call center and informal experts, you are able to create a better customer experience and improve employee productivity.

Maximizing Your Investment
In order to take full advantage of unified communications and knock down the silos within an organization, however, the technology must be implemented and built

into an enterprise's underlying infrastructure layer and be part of its foundation. In addition, the organization as a whole needs to think broadly in terms of how unified communications can transform its business. Too often, organizations implement new technology to do exactly what their old technology was doing. Or, they implement a solution to fix an immediate need, not thinking about the future.

Video-enabled chat and video conferencing, for example, can promote human interaction both internally within an organization as well as externally with customers. In a contact center setting, a supervisor may not be in the same location as an agent. With video-enabled chat or collaboration, however, the agent and supervisor can collaborate as if they were in the same location. This isn't the only way this technology can benefit this organization's contact center; perhaps the organization is considering video-enabled chat as a method in which customers can reach agents.

When the organization rolls this offering out to its customers, the underlying technology will be in place. By evaluating current communication processes throughout an entire organization and implementing open-standards-based UC technology at the core, businesses will be able to meet today's immediate objectives, and have the infrastructure in place to meet the objectives that lie ahead of them tomorrow.

Zeacom
Ernie Wallerstein (News - Alert), Jr., President

Of course, contact centers are continually looking to improve their quality of service and enhance every customer's experience. At the same time, operations managers are looking to increase agent productivity. This jargon is nothing new to the ears and eyes of a contact center manager. So, what new and affordable technologies can integrate with existing systems to fulfill both of these needs?

You have probably heard the term unified communications (UC) being thrown around a lot lately. Did you know that contact centers have had characteristics of UC within their own environment for over a decade? (It just wasn't called UC!)

Think about the contact center's use of unified communications:

Multimedia. Customers have been communicating with applications-enabled contact centers via voice, e-mail, Web chat and fax;

Agent presence. The state of other agents in co-located and geographically dispersed contact centers has been delivered for years by companies like Zeacom, Aspect, Genesys and Interactive Intelligence.

IP and TDM. Software-based solutions have provided the bridge and migration strategy from TDM (traditional voice) to IPT (packet switched voice).

Soft phone. Control of the phone via the desktop user interface has been a key deliverable of contact center applications

The challenge for the contact center solutions providers has been how to break down the barrier to the rest of the enterprise. The contact center agent is used to being in front of and using their desktop application all day. The user interface did not work well and was typically too cumbersome for the rest of the enterprise.

By adopting today's newer approach, where the entire organization uses one communication interface (though simply more robust for agents and console operators), the contact center has real-time access to subject matter experts across the entire enterprise. Agents can see if the sales rep for a specific customer is at their desk or available via their mobile phone in the event of an escalation or a sales-sensitive request from a customer. Additionally, agents can easily work from home in adverse weather conditions. By using software-enabled UC, an agent's mobile phone can become their extension. Managers can see if an agent is on a contact center call, even if it is on their cell phone.

In addition, field technicians can become part of an extended contact center — the field tech can simply use his or her mobile device to set the applicable presence. For example, the technician can choose on-site, or traveling to site, or available. And leveraging a conference bridge, agents can quickly set up a bridge and drag and drop attendees (for example, a customer, contact center manager, and sales rep) to set up a conference call — there is no need to send an e-mail with a bridge number. **CIS**

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Thursday - September 18 ....7:00 am - 4:00 pm

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Thursday - September 18 ......11:00 am - 5:00 pm

Conference Session Times*

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Wednesday, September 17:

- **Position Your Contact Center in a Web 2.0 World**
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- **Benefits of VoIP Enabled Recording**
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- **Innovation in the Skype Enabled Call Center**
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Wednesday, September 17:

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- **CRM Software as a Service**
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Thursday, September 18

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- **Improving Customer Experience One Transaction at a Time**
- **The Importance of First Call Resolution**
- **Leveraging Speech Analytics for Customer Satisfaction**
- **Workforce Optimization Strategies**

Penny Reynolds, *THE CALL CENTER SCHOOL*

Yearning for E-Learning? The Pros and Cons of the Virtual Classroom for Your Call Center

Call center professionals today face a mind-numbing array of training choices. You can choose from dozens of traditional classroom seminars on a wide variety of topics. Or take a class via the Web with other students from across the country from the comfort of your own office. Or choose your own time and pace and take an e-learning module via CD or the Web. So many choices for you and your staff….so, how do you decide?

This article looks at the wide variety of training options available today and helps define the pros and cons of each training medium.

ILT Classroom Programs

Your first choice is doing training the old-fashioned way: traditional, classroom training with a live instructor. This is referred to as ILT, or instructor-led training. It's worked for years and still is the most common way to deliver training in most call centers. Training can be developed and delivered by in-house staff or can be done through professional training firms, either at a public site, or as in-house training.

Much of its success depends upon development of good courseware, with the most successful programs being built upon adult learning principles. A knowledgeable instructor who's adept at facilitation is also key to successful knowledge transfer and learning. If both courseware and facilitation are good, then ILT programs are very effective. And they have the benefit of immediate question/answer, interaction with an instructor and other students, and the leveraging of class questions for further learning.

Classroom training does have its drawbacks however. It's the most expensive type of training and can be quite costly for one-to-few training. Training often happens too late or too soon, with training happening based upon a calendar or schedule plan, instead of the student's immediate needs.

It's best for organizations that have multiple students at a single location at a similar skill level. Classroom training is the top choice when learning needs to involve highly interactive knowledge sharing, or where new skills need to practiced and observed with feedback.

Self-Paced E-Learning

E-learning focuses on delivery of training via an electronic medium: typically either from CD, from a training program residing on an internal server or intranet, or via the Web. Online learning offers an obvious range of benefits, such as self-paced learning, consistency of delivery, approved content, speed of delivery, and round-the-clock accessibility.

And depending upon how it's developed and delivered, it can be quite cost-effective when compared to traditional ILT programs. IBM, for example, estimates that for every 1,000 classroom days of training replaced by e-learning methodology, the company saves nearly a half-million dollars. And that doesn't even include the savings in travel costs.

But it's not for everyone. E-learning requires some level of self-directed motivation which can be problematic for many employees. And the collaboration and interaction with a teacher and other students in a traditional classroom environment is often difficult to replicate in the online learning experience.

It's perhaps best utilized in a "basic training" mode where it's necessary to "teach" certain knowledge. And it's also an obvious choice when there are many students that need to participate stretched over multiple locations.

Real-Time Web Training

There's one other solution that manages to combine the best of both training worlds into one solution. Synchronous, or real-time, training via the Web (or intranet) is a nice "in between choice" for many training applications. It combines the live instruction from the classroom with the cost benefits of the online training.

In most Web training scenarios, training is scheduled and the student participates via a Web connection for the training visuals, and by telephone or VoIP for the instructor audio portion.

Blended Learning: The Optimal Solution For Most Call Centers

Thankfully, it's not an "either/or" decision between the three previous choices. While online learning offers an attractive range of benefits, the successful learning organization understands that

the social aspects of traditional classroom training are an essential element in effective learning. The use of a wide range of training methods and media to enhance and maximize learning opportunities is known as "blended learning."

Let's take a look at how blended learning fits into the many aspects of call center training and professional development, beginning with the front-line staff. We begin by looking at the three different areas of knowledge and skills needed by most call center agents. See if you can determine which medium is the best approach for each area.

Product knowledge. Much will be basic information that is simply a "data dump." And some students will absorb this information faster than others. This is probably a good place to port basic training information to an online, self-paced training. Have new agents go through the basics with e-learning, and save your instructors to present the more advanced material and to facilitate interaction as students fine-tune and test out their new knowledge about the company and products. If the students are all in one place, then regular classroom training is probably the best solution to accomplish the latter, but if your students are geographically dispersed, then a Web training solution may better fit your needs.

Soft skills. There are some basic rules of telephone etiquette and some communications skills that can be "e-learned" – no doubt about it. But keep in mind that while it may be easy to master the basic concepts, it's actually much harder to perform the skills once your representative is live on a call! To get it right, these reps need a lot of practice. And this practice should preferably be in a social context, since what they're learning are social skills after all. There's a big difference in learning the concepts (which may be done through e-learning), and actually experiencing and practicing those new skills (which lends itself to classroom instruction,

		Product Training		Soft Skills		Call Center Operations	
		Basic	Advanced	Theory	Practice	General	Specialty
1st Choice		E	C	E	C	E	C
2nd Choice		W	W	W	W	W	W
3rd Choice		C	E	C	E	C	E

E= e-learning   W = Web seminar (eILT) C = classroom (ILT)

peer learning, and one-to-one coaching.)

Make sure when deciding upon which medium to use here, you're making a distinction between the theory (what they need to know) versus the practice (of demonstrating the skill).

Call center operations. Every employee in the call center needs a basic frame of reference about the overall operations of the center. Each person needs a basic understanding of how call center performance is measured and why, how overall call center goals translate down to individual goals and how performance will be monitored and measured, how staffing levels are determined and what the impact is of just one person being out of place, what technologies are at work to deliver a call to the desktop, and so on. All this is pretty basic information, and just like the product information, could be delivered effectively via an e-learning medium. This is a case where classroom activity and one-to-one instruction is probably not needed. (So let's save it for the soft skills training!)

The chart on the opposite page ranks the various training methodologies in delivering the critical components of a front-line agent training program.

As you can see in Table 1, a blended approach to learning is the ideal choice for training your front-line staff. Some aspects of the training lend themselves to students working on their own. Other parts of the training may happen at their own pace, but in more of a directed environment, such as e-learning for basic content, followed by a group activities and debrief activities led by an instructor. Other aspects will be better covered by social learning, where students learn by participation with an instructor and fellow students.

Yearning For E-Learning?

As you begin to evaluate e-learning options, it's important to beware of "techno-lust" – the desire to implement the latest and greatest technology to address your training needs. Too many call centers have failed with their e-learning initiatives by trying to force too much content into the online medium. A safer approach involves taking small steps into e-learning conversion and realizing that not all aspects of your current training are appropriate for the virtual classroom.

Using online learning in a preparatory way to teach fundamental concepts followed by the participatory environment of the Web class or traditional classroom ILT program has the following benefits:
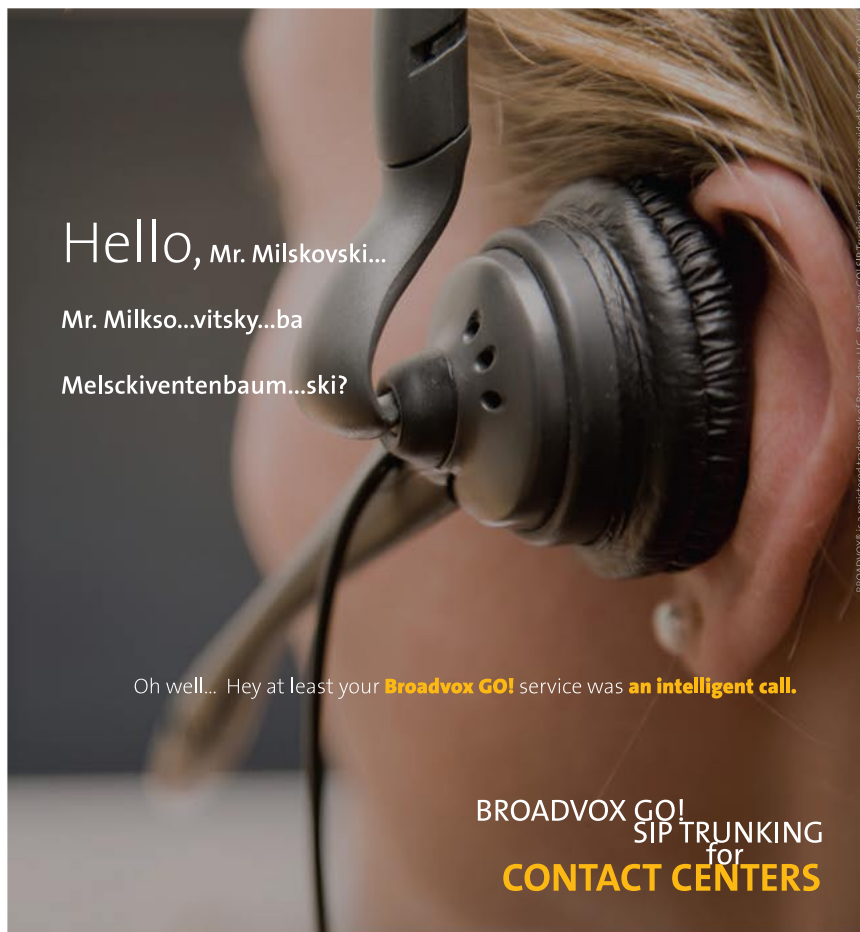
- Optimal use of student time, since early learning can take place anytime, anywhere;
- Solidifies the concepts in students' minds before practicing/discussing in social context;

- Frees up more expensive classroom instruction for the practice and polishing of skills; and
- Saves money by shortening (but not eliminating!) classroom time.

So when developing your training curriculum and deciding upon the medium, let your content, your message, and your students guide you in identifying the best fit for e-learning in your call center. **CIS**

Penny Reynolds is a Founding Partner of The Call Center School, a Nashville, Tennessee based consulting and education company. The company provides a wide range of educational offerings for call center professionals, including traditional classroom courses, Web-based seminars, and self-paced e-learning programs at the manager, supervisor, and front-line staff level. For more information, see www.thecallcenterschool.com or call 615-812-8400.

By Brad Schorer,
SVP of Marketing and
Business Development,
VoltDelta Hosted Solutions

Agent at Home: More Than Wearing Slippers To Work

Agent at home" is more than a new buzz phrase or job title that takes business casual dress to an extreme level. Instead, it is becoming a key asset in the contact center industry that is increasing overall contact center performance, agent productivity, and enhancing hiring options for the industry. "Agent at home" technologies usually include an advanced ACD capability to route calls to the right agent, web-based or thin client software, and flexible telephony infrastructure such as VoIP or SIP. These technologies enable a contact center worker to perform their duties from anyplace that has a computer with a high-speed Internet connection.

There are many common examples where "agent at home" is a key asset to the contact center:

Retaining knowledge workers. These are employees that have a specialized skill or experience set that can be retained and given a more flexible working arrangement using "agent at home" technologies. Nurses, support experts, veterans, stay-at-home moms and semi-retired people are all examples of knowledge workers who can provide their expertise to the contact center and retain a flexible schedule while working from home .

Overflow and seasonal peak volumes. During anticipated high volume call periods, these employees can be used to handle the increased call volumes without actually being in the contact center. Non-contact center employees or outsourced agents using "agent at home" technologies can be deployed quickly to augment the contact center during high volume periods.

Disaster recovery. "Agent at home" can play a central role in disaster recovery plans by ensuring that contact center agents can still perform their duties from any location that has high-speed Internet connectivity.

Regardless of the exact use of "agent at home" technologies, there are some significant benefits to be gained through their use:

Retain talent. Knowledge workers are difficult to replace; the costs associated with ramping a new employee to have the knowledge and experience of a departing employee are significant. By enabling a knowledge worker to have more flexibility in their schedule and work environment, companies are able to better retain valuable human capital.

Reduce capital expenditure. By using "agents at home," contact centers need only to invest in a contact center that is sized to handle the average expected volumes and use the other employees or outsourced agents from home to supplement the center during peak times.

Increased customer satisfaction. Contact centers using "agents at home" are more likely to enable their callers to speak with an agent who is best able to handle the call. Intelligent routing technology enables the contact center to connect callers with appropriate knowledge workers and thereby provide an efficient and effective customer experience.

Lower overhead costs. Because agents using "agent at home" are not in the actual contact center the size, climate control and power use of that center are all reduced.

"Agent at home" technologies are more than a new convenience; they will change the way contact centers operate and the way businesses use them. Contact center personnel and agents will become less concentrated in specific locations but will be spread throughout the organization. There will be fewer contact center generalists and more specialists. This trend mirrors the knowledge worker revolution in the business world as a whole as described by the famous management consultant and professor, Peter Drucker. More calls will be routed to the most appropriate specialist and fewer to the first available generalist, enabling callers to get a better call experience. The technologies that are today called "agent at home" will be the prime driver of this revolutionary change. **CIS**

About VoltDelta Hosted Solutions

VoltDelta (News - Alert) *Hosted Solutions provides contact centers of all types with access to leading edge technologies including agent at home solutions, speech automation, IVR, ACD, VoIP transport, multi-modal messaging and outbound alerts on the per-minute used model. To learn more, please visit www.voltdelta.com/voltdelta-hosted-solutions.*

Attaining And Retaining Mature Agents

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

If you manage or supervise a call center, chances are pretty good you are familiar with drama. According to Booz, Allen, Hamilton, the average brick-and-mortar call center agent is between 18 and 28 years old. Not to disparage the youth demographic as a whole, for there are many terrific and enthusiastic workers in this employee group, but as a manager, you've probably noticed that personal drama is more likely to emanate from this age group. Not only that, a lack of professional experience means this group is still in its learning phase as professionals in terms of job performance, interpersonal employee relationships, time management and response to criticism. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, more youthful call center workers are more likely to view call center work as a step to something else: a way to pay the bills before the "real" career begins. Therefore, they may not have as much to invest in customer support jobs as an older worker.

According to that same Booz, Allen, Hamilton study, the average at-home call center worker is between 30 to 48 years old. Because of the very flexible nature of home call center agent work, it is more likely to attract the parents of young children, veterans, semi-retired persons and people with physical disabilities. Quality at-home work is extremely valuable to these demographics of workers. Personal maturity reflects in job quality and reliability, interpersonal skills, life experience to draw upon and a vested interest in retaining the job and viewing it as a career rather than a step to somewhere else.

The expectations of the number of home agents in the U.S. in the next several years vary between 225,000 to 300,000. Regardless of which estimate is correct, it's undeniable that hiring home agents is on its way to becoming a normal operating procedure for contact centers and customer support operations. Whether it's the price of gas, the price of building overhead, the need to pull support operations from foreign shores or the need to improve customer service to retain customers in a slow economy, it seems that the "perfect storm" that will make the home agent model succeed is brewing. It's vital that companies with large customer support needs begin evaluating their technologies and services with a goal of putting a framework in place that can enable the home agent model in the near future.

Because as the economy splutters and it becomes ever more important to keep the customers you've got, can you afford more drama in the call center?

Workforce Management Finding Dissatisfaction, According To Study

Customer Relationship Metrics, L.C., a provider of research excellence, has announced the completion of a three-month study into Contact Center Workforce Management Practices in North America. This research was sponsored by Verint, InVision, Calabrio (News - Alert), and Aspect Software.

Endorsed by the Society of Workforce Management Planning Professionals (SWPP), this research was led by famed consumer scientist Dr. Jodie Monger, President of Customer Relationship Metrics.

During the study, participants answered questions that addresses numerous topics, including performance metrics, workforce management resources utilized, investments, processes, tools and satisfaction with each of these areas.

The study found there to be dissatisfaction with both the workforce management process and with workforce management software. Those not satisfied with the process came in at 47 percent, up from 38 percent in 2006. Those unhappy with the software came in at 46 percent, up from 41 percent in 2006.

Overall experience for all job roles has declined between 2006 and 2008. A greater percentage of workforce managers, forecasting specialists, scheduling and intraday specialists reported zero to five years of experience, an increase to 62 percent from 55 percent.

The study also found an overall decline in training between 2006 and 2008 as 18.5 percent of job roles reported less than 10 total hours of training. This was an increase from 13.3 percent in 2006.

In addition, 66 percent of all respondents reported performing skill set scheduling in 2006 and this figure increased dramatically in 2008 to 79 percent. The greatest percentage of customers reported having a suite-based performance optimization as only somewhat important in the 2008 study.

What is important to note with workforce management software is that often, companies will implement solutions that are meant to improve their overall performance, yet fail to accurately train on the solution so that it can be used to its maximum capability. When this happens, the company not only struggles to use what they have, they are unable to enjoy the full benefit that the solution can provide.

Other research into this area has also found that companies will often implement workforce management solutions without accurately assessing their needs and determining where they can extend the most value with the solution. Failure to do so properly will surely lead to dissatisfaction, no matter the vendor or the solution.

Customer Relationship Metrics is a research and consulting and managed services firm specializing in designing and conducting customized customer experience research programs. The company was founded in 1993 and is a certified woman-owned business.

Its President, Dr. Jodie Monger, was the inventor of real-time surveying for contact centers and is the founding Associate Director of Purdue University's (News - Alert) Center for Customer-Driven Quality. **CIS**

Survey Studies Global Contact Center Performance

Contact centers are an important interaction point between the company and the customer, yet many contact centers still struggle with delivering the level of customer service the customer expects. One of the most effective methods for improving performance is to measure it from the customer's perspective.

To better gauge how contact centers are doing overall, ICMI's Global Service Index Report shares the results of a mystery-shopper-based assessment of call center services practices both in the U.S. and abroad. This survey was developed and executed by OmniTouch International.

A recent study of service performance in the telecommunications sector found that the U.S. ranked the highest in overall performance of telecom call centers in seven countries at 64 percent. The UK. followed closely at 63 percent and Indonesia at 60 percent. These rankings are not enough, however, to indicate that customer service levels are where they should be in order to effectively drive business.

One of the first elements of consideration in the survey was the accessibility of customer service agents within the contact centers that were studied. Throughout the world, the average waiting time was 155 seconds across all calls. There appeared to be substantial inter-country variations.

In Australia, there was a substantial difference in the customer experience among those calling the chosen providers. Two providers answered in less than one minute, while two others answered in less than seven minutes. For one provider, the average wait time was a staggering 45 minutes.

China was also greatly skewed in accessibility as the majority of calls occurred in a timely manner of less than two minutes. The surprising aspect was that there was an outlier of calls that had a much longer wait time of eight minutes.

India proved to shine in accessibility as wait times were very short. The majority of contact centers answered in less than 10 seconds and the longest wait came in a three minutes. For Indonesian call centers, the performance was much like those located in India.

Both Singapore and the U.K. proved to perform very well in response times. Agents in Singapore answered calls within 25 seconds, and in the U.K., wait times were less than 50 seconds. The U.S. turned in a less than stellar performance at four minutes or less. One center kept a caller on hold for 16 minutes, while another pushed it to 42.

The collective centers that were studied in this survey operated a wide variety of IVR systems, both push button and speech recognition. The centers also used a variety of approaches to properly routing calls. For those that provided rapid access to agents, the likelihood of a satisfying experience for the customer increases significantly. **CIS**

Yahoo's Voice Search Ambitions

In his VoIP blog, Rich Tehrani (News - Alert) writes:

[In April] at Interop, I asked exhibitors and analysts what they were hearing about the economy. Most said they think the recovery would be "U-shaped" as opposed to "V-shaped," but some thought that Q3 would be the start of a recovery.

Interestingly, it seems the companies that are marketing aggressively are doing better than the quiet companies that have basically turned out the lights and are hoping for the best.

An example of the former, Interactive Intelligence — a company reporting record profits — was cited here [recently].

I have to admit that I believe the housing market is still inflated and has 30 to 40 percent to drop. I am no real estate analyst, mind you, but it seems the run up was too fast and we haven't seen that much air taken out of most of the market.

If I am right, this drag on the economy could be offset fairly easily. We need an increased focus on public works. Basically, repairing the infrastructure of America. Our bridges and roads are a mess and we need to hire many people to fix these problems. This is akin to the New Deal, which was how we got the economy back on track after the Great Depression.

One point that does tie unified communications more closely with the economy is a conversation I had with Jay Burrell and Kendra Petrone of Nokia and Chris Thompson (News - Alert) of Cisco. Jay told me that in a few of his recent meetings, CIOs are telling him they need UC because employees can't afford gas and they want to work from home.

So UC, it seems is becoming a way to offset high gas prices. If you add this to long-distance savings brought on by VoIP, communications technologies are in a great position to be boosted by a slow economy and soaring gas prices.

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

IP Fairy Dust

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

Here's something you don't think about very often.

When connecting to the public telephone network in the U.S., many VoIP and wireless telephone companies are essentially "riding for free," since they are not transmitting sufficient identification information to allow the traditional carriers to charge them. Apparently, this is particularly hard on rural telephone companies, which make up 29 percent of their revenue from inter-carrier compensation (carrying traffic for another company).

One such rural provider disdains the process. Ramond Henagan, General Manager of Missouri's Rock Port Telephone, stated that some VoIP providers have refused to pay access fees by saying the FCC (News - Alert) has "given them permission to use the networks for free because they're IP," Henagan said. "You and I both know these are regular voice calls, people talking to people. Because these companies have sprinkled IP fairy dust on them, they think they get a free ride."

You don't read the phrase "IP fairy dust" every day, do you?

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

Cisco Is Green (With Envy)

In his Hyperconnected Enterprise blog, Tony Rybczynski (News - Alert), Director of Strategic Enterprise Technologies for Nortel, writes:

Cisco is green (with envy) that Nortel data solutions are 50 percent more energy efficient. Green may be in, but Cisco products carry a huge energy tax.

Cisco's response #1: market green and hope the customer doesn't see the Cisco energy tax on his bill.

Cisco's response #2: start redesigning its products (this probably won't be just another upgrade).

What's the customer to do #1: Don't get distracted by Cisco marketing.

What's the customer to do #2: Fund your data and/or UC evolution through energy tax savings.

What's the customer to do #3: Get the facts and do the math.

Visit Tony's blog at http://blog.tmcnet.com/the-hyperconnect-ed-enterprise/

Data Centers Find They Can't Afford Not To "Go Green"

In TMCnet's "Green Blog," Mae Kowalke writes:

In the data center market, the need for green technology solutions to reduce energy consumption is rapidly becoming imperative. That's according to executives who gathered for a panel recently during Computerworld's Storage Networking World conference.

Going green is no longer just a matter of moral rightness or social responsibility, Computerworld reported. It is now becoming a business necessity for data center operations to know how much energy each device consumes and to find ways of reducing that energy consumption. It simply costs too much to not do so.

"If you use more energy [than presently] and it's more expensive, expect your costs to go up," said Andrew Fanara, team leader for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star Product Specifications Development Group. "These problems will intensify."

Last month, Computerworld reported, the EPA said it is working on a benchmark to help IT managers compare their own energy usage with that of other data center operations. A server specification should be complete by year's end, with a green storage benchmark (in development by the Storage Networking Industry Association) expected even sooner.

Visit the Green Blog at http://blog.tmcnet.com/green-blog/

Call Screening Patent

In his VoIP & Gadgets Blog, TMC's Tom Keating (News - Alert) writes:

While researching for my VoIP call screening post, I came across a patent for "call screening." Curious, I decided to check it out the filed patent and found it was filed by Nortel (News - Alert) Networks in July 2004. Interestingly, the patent application agrees with me that hosted voice mail needs call screening and goes as far as to say service providers with hosted voicemail systems are at a competitive disadvantage when they don't have call screening.

The text of the patent itself makes no mention of VoIP, so this is strictly traditional PSTN-hosted voice mail call screening. Earlier, I griped about the lack of real-time call screening in VoIP services, such as Vonage (News - Alert) and Packet8. It's not that hard, especially if using software. You should be able to easily setup a three-way conference call via SIP to enable call screening. That is, one leg is the caller, the second leg is your phone, and the last leg is special call screening software running on your PC. You just send a SIP invite to the PC, have the software auto-accept the SIP invite and connect legs two and three. If the user accepts the call, simply connect/conference leg one.

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

VOVICI™

By Jim Ivers,
Chief Marketing Officer,
Vovici

Innovative Solutions From The Enterprise Feedback Management Experts

The Security of Online Surveys: How Safe is it to Respond?

You may have a real threat to your organization's data security perimeter you may have never considered, much less taken action to prevent. This threat is not the result of some sinister activity or technical exploit of your network — it comes from your employees performing what would generally be perceived as a benign act.

The use of online survey software to collect feedback from customers is growing consistently as companies search for ways to take the pulse of their customer base. As a result, there is a growing roster of companies that offer survey solutions, ranging from simple survey tools to comprehensive enterprise feedback management solutions that help companies build, manage, and analyze survey activity.

Inviting customers to take a survey and collecting results means customer data is exposed. The vast majority of online surveys use email to send invitations to potential respondents. This requires customer data in the form of mailing lists and other information be loaded onto the servers of the survey solution provider. Responses to the survey are also stored on these same servers and are accumulated over time for analysis. Depending on the nature of the survey, the responses result in detailed profiles that include customer information such as:

- Opinions
- Preferences
- Buying habits
- Demographics
- Contact information

Taking a survey is an act of trust by the respondent, who provides this data trusting that it will be used appropriately and handled securely.

Unfortunately, this may not be a valid assumption. As noted, there are many survey solutions on the market, some of which are very inexpensive. However, choosing a low-cost survey solution could mean that your data — both the customer data from the organization and the data from the responses is stored on an unprotected server. Since many of these tools use the software as a service model, the survey data remains on the survey provider's servers, raising additional questions of data integrity and protection. Data could be stolen in minutes, or destroyed by a hardware failure.

The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that employees within an organization can engage one of these providers without the knowledge of the IT department and security specialists that are in place to protect data. Experience has shown that unless an organization has a strict policy about surveys, most large to medium size organizations will have disconnected pockets of staff doing surveys — each group may be using a different survey vendor. In such cases, it is not unreasonable to believe the data for any given customer may have been uploaded to multiple servers, some with a potentially questionable security profile.

As the adoption of online feedback has increased, there is a distinct and growing movement by organizations to centralize feedback activity. While security is one reason, control over the process is also important. Branding, elimination of survey fatigue, and the ability to better share the feedback data across the organization are elements of control attained through centralized feedback. Centralizing and standardizing survey management makes it easier to enforce security standards and requirements, making security an important criterion in selecting a survey vendor.

Companies are waking up to the fact that the casual use of low cost survey software is creating a real and potentially widespread security threat. The bottom line is that while collecting customer feedback is a noble goal, organizations should be much more aware of the potential risks associated with low-cost solutions. Enterprises should take steps to identify what survey tools are in use within their organization. Security should move to the front of the list when selecting a survey provider; the money saved by using a low-cost survey provider is not worth the reputational risk and the potential of lost customers.

The value of having an ongoing dialogue with customers is enormous, and online survey software can provide tremendous value in engaging with customers on a consistent basis. What cannot be forgotten in this process is that the data used to distribute a survey and the data collected with the survey is customer data and must be treated with the same level of protection and integrity required in handling any other customer data. **CIS**

Vovici (News - Alert) is the pioneer in Enterprise Feedback Management, offering products and services that increase customer loyalty, facilitate collaboration and innovation, influence critical business decisions, and provide a voice to online communities. Organizations worldwide, including more than 58 percent of the Fortune 500, rely on Vovici to help them effectively use surveys to identify employee satisfaction, market research, and customer satisfaction; and act on that information to create long-term relationships, increase profitability and facilitate time-critical actions that drive business results.

Seeking Survey Salvation
By Greg Galitzine (News - Alert)

Security threats can be considered a sin visited upon your organization by outside forces, be they truly malignant or even seemingly benign, as outlined in the main featured article on this page. The author, Jim Ivers, of Vovici, understands the nature of online surveys thoroughly and in fact his firm has published a list of Seven Deadly Survey Sins that should be avoided at all costs. The list and a full explanation of how to avoid the sins is available online at http://www.vovici.com/PDFs/BestPractices/Best-Practices_SurveySins.pdf

Presented here, in abridged form is the list of things to avoid if you want to generate positive and useful results without ruining your relationship with your customer or worse yet, generating a wealth of data with no practical use or way of analyzing it.

1. Interrogating instead of asking. Don't ask questions you know the answers to, and don't ask leading questions — it skews the results.

2. Colombo syndrome. Avoid asking "just one more question." Keep within a unified theme and keep the focus clear.

3. Field of Dreams fallacy: "If you build it they will come." Target the proper audience with a clear and concise invitation to participate in the survey. Offer incentives. Don't assume everyone wants to respond out of sheer kindness.

4. Monty Python Disease — SPAM. Know your customer, and comply with anti-spam regulations.

5. Data worship. Design your surveys for optimal quality. And remember it's the analysis that counts.

6. All substance. No style. Make your presentations a worthwhile read for the end user. Make the data dynamic.

7. Mr. Magoo syndrome — Data myopia. Repurpose data whenever possible. Don't underestimate the value of the results.

For a full understanding of the Seven Deadly Survey Sins as presented by Vovici, and tips on how to avoid them, please visit the company online at www.vovici.com.

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Display Technologies Roundup

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

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

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

While most medium to large-sized call centers today retain the familiar wall-mounted boards (though they, too, have changed in appearance from the old days), the information can also be replicated on agents', managers' and supervisors' desktops. The data can take on extra importance, should thresholds be crossed or not met, and be turned into screen pops and alerts, e-mails, alarms and phone calls. The information may reveal weaknesses with certain individual agents, work groups or call center locations, prompting extra training. The data yielded by the display/reader board system can be communicated wirelessly to handheld devices such as PDAs, allowing management to keep track of the statistics anywhere and at any time.

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

Display Technologies Providers

NEC
www.necunifiedsolutions.com

Spectrum Corp. (News - Alert)
www.specorp.com

Symon Communications, Inc.
www.symon.com

Telecorp Products, Inc.
www.telecorpproducts.com

Telegenix
www.telegenix.com

Texas Digital Systems, Inc.
www.txdigital.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS • AD INDEX
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Greg Galitzine, GROUP EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, TMC

Last Call? First Round

The summer season officially kicks off about three-quarters through this month of June, but being deadline oriented, and fixated on the map three months out, I find myself listening to Don Henley's Boys of Summer and thinking, "my, but the summer flew by fast!"

Well, back to reality. It's still late May, and there's work to be done. And chief among the tasks for the coming months is the reinvigoration and reinvention of the magazine you now hold in your hands. Why mess with success? Well the fact is time moves on and every once in a while it makes sense to clean out the garage, or rearrange the furniture, or brighten up the living spaces with a fresh coat of paint.

In keeping with this theme, loyal readers will notice a change between this issue and the next issue, especially when it comes to the team leading the makeover. For starters I will have an increasing role in the day to day operation and direction of this publication, and it's truly an honor to be entrusted to carry on the tradition of this industry flagship as we close in on closing out our third decade of publishing advice and information for the contact center industry. This issue is the start of our 27th year of publishing Customer Interaction Solutions®, through its various forms. Starting with Telemarketing® magazine back in 1982, straight through to the issue you hold in your hands, our mission has always been to provide the call/contact center industry with the best information they need to not only operate their contact centers according to the best practices of the industry, but also to identify and select and ultimately purchase the best technology for their various enterprises.

For those of you unfamiliar with my background, I've been with TMC for the past 12 years or so, focusing primarily on our technology publications, CTI magazine, Internet Telephony (News - Alert) magazine, and our two newest launches IMS and Unified Communications magazines. I've also played a role in the ongoing revolution of our Web site, and I'm excited by the prospect of rolling up my sleeves and helping drive this publication towards its 30th anniversary issue and beyond to our fourth decade of providing you with the information you need to do your job best.

Of course, I can't do this by myself, so we've gone out and recruited some of the best talent available. To begin with I'd like to announce that Brendan Read has joined the Customer Interaction Solutions team and will be serving in the capacity of Senior Contributing Editor. Feel free to welcome Brendan with an e-mail addressed to bread@tmcnet.com. Also feel free to send him requests for coverage, breaking news releases and an occasional note just to say hello and to let him know how we are doing serving you as a reader."

Brendan has extensive experience covering site selection, outsourcing, teleworking, e-learning/e-training, and business continuity, and has held editorial positions with several other publications in the space. He is author of "Designing the Best Call Center for Your Business, Home Workplace," and, with Joe Fleischer, "The Complete Guide to Customer Support." He is also a contributor to The Computer Telephony Encyclopedia, authored by INTERNET TELEPHONY editor Richard 'Zippy' Grigonis.

Brendan has been on the inside of the contact center industry for more than a decade. He has provided corporate communications for The AnswerNet Network, one of the Top 50 Teleservices Agencies, from 2004 until 2007. In addition, Read has spoken and has been a panelist at numerous industry conferences.

Of course we are continually working to attract the best and brightest minds in the industry to join our ranks as columnists, contributors and all around participants in this community of interest we know as Customer Interaction Solutions.

So, my inbox is officially open for business related to this publication and I look forward to your feedback. What can we do better? Where can we improve our coverage? What would you like to see more of in these pages? Where do we rearrange furniture, and where do we explore wholesale changes?

I welcome all comments and all criticism with an eye towards creating the best publication for all parties involved, our reader community and our advertiser community as well. It may sound a bit cliché, but it's true that as we grow and our industry grows apace, we need to create better avenues of communication and work together to enjoy a vibrant and healthy community centered around Customer Interaction Solutions magazine.

I look forward to serving this community and helping it grow. Feel free to send e-mail to ggalitzine@tmcnet.com. **CIS**

> **Loyal readers will notice a change between this issue and the next issue, especially when it comes to the team leading the makeover.**

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Responding To An Absurd Claim From A Customer
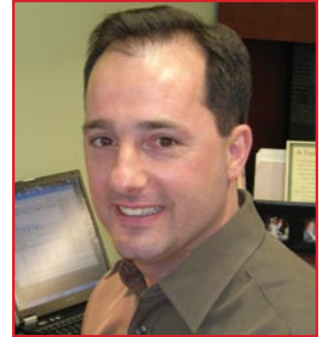
By Tim Passios,
Director of Product Management,
Interactive Intelligence

Q I'm a customer service team member for an auto manufacturer. Recently, a gentleman called requesting to speak with someone "high up." When I asked him what the issue was, he refused to say and continued to request that he speak with a supervisor. I didn't want to upset the guy even more, but in order to get him to the right person, I told him I had to know what the situation was. After a moment of silence, the caller finally told me that he had flooded his new SUV while he was launching a boat. As he put it, "I backed down the boat ramp and stopped a little past the launch point, and when I got out to roll the boat off the trailer, water came pouring in through my door and totally flooded the interior. It's obviously a manufacturer's defect, and I'd like it fixed!"

To say it was an unusual case would be an understatement, so without a word, I transferred the call to my supervisor. Unfortunately, I never heard how she handled it, and now I'm curious. What would you have said to the caller? (The cause of the flooding seemed apparent to me and probably worth a joke or two, although I know a joke would have been inappropriate and cause for a disciplinary write-up, or more.)

A You know, after nearly 18 years in this industry, I've heard some strange complaints from customers, but this one definitely reaches unchartered waters. A "little past" the launch point? Just a hunch here, but something tells me the guy was half a mile out into the lake… so I'll crack the obvious joke for you:

"Sir, is your SUV the LE (Land Edition) or the H2O Edition?"

No matter how absurd or amusing a customer's claim might be, Rule #1 of being a call center agent is that you should always refrain from thinking aloud and saying something a customer might interpret as inappropriate or a personal affront, even if said in jest. So, from that standpoint, you handled yourself quite professionally. Personally, though, I don't favor constantly muzzling agents and turning them into robots, but the fact is, Corporate America and the societal differences of global markets leave no room for attempted humor during a business interaction. Which brings us back to Rule #1 and the need for professionalism, discretion and tact at all times.

To their credit, most experienced agents in customer service understand having to keep their thoughts to themselves at certain times. Likewise to the credit of most call centers, they know that ongoing training and a supervisor's guidance will let agents know what's off limits when a customer is on the other end of the line. However, that's not to say an agent can't go on break and tell co-workers what they wish they could have said!

Honestly. Anyone who's ever worked in a call center will tell you they've made light of some bizarre customer claim behind the scenes. It's simply an outlet for that mischievous inner voice that always seems to battle with your professional image. I consider such an outlet invaluable, in that it helps the agent balance decorum with the absurdity of someone consciously flooding an SUV and saying it's a manufacturer's defect.

The "Outrageous Interactions" Promotion

Absurd, embarrassing, outrageous, whatever you want to call them. The "Outrageous Interactions" promotion is both an outlet and contest for contact center agents and managers to tell us your most outrageous stories. As a contest, you can win a five-day/four-night trip to Hawaii if your story is selected as the most unusual. Or win $500 if our panel of judges selects your "referral" story of another agent or manager as being the best one.

Submit your entries before August 31, 2008; we'll announce the winner on September 30. For more details and to enter online, visit the "Outrageous Interactions" Web site at www.outrageousinteractions.com.

May the best story win, or perhaps the most absurd one.

Tim Passios 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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