TMC®

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

26 Years of Excellence

March 2008 • Vol. 26/No. 10
www.cismag.com

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

Industry Leaders' Forecast For 2008

Also In This Issue:

- The Call Center Customer Of The Future
- The 23rd Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Ranking
- End-to-End SIP In The Contact Center

If you value your customers...

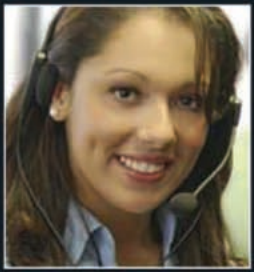
...why do you keep them ON HOLD?

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

9 seconds
Average time to answer inbound calls.

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

3 percent
Overall percent of inbound calls abandoned.



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

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

InfoCision Management Corporation
25 years
1982 - 2007

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

TMC CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®

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

Group Publisher
Richard Tehrani (rtehrani@tmcnet.com)

EDITORIAL
203-852-6800 (cispress@tmcnet.com)
Editorial Director, **Tracey E. Schelmetic**
Group Editorial Director, **Greg Galitzine**

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
David Sims
Patrick Barnard
Susan Campbell
Stefania Viscusi

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

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

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

To Subscribe, Call: 203-852-6800

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

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

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

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

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

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

ADVERTISING SALES: 203-852-6800
Karl Sundstrom, ext. 119 (ksundstrom@tmcnet.com)
Senior Advertising Director
Eastern, Western, International
Todd Haimerl, ext. 130 (thaimerl@tmcnet.com)
Account Executive

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

Editorial Offices are located at One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A. **Customer Service:** for all customer service matters, call 203-852-6800.

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

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

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

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

Publisher's Outlook

26 Years Young And Still Growing

Nadji Tehrani, *CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.*

Since 1982, when this publication was launched as Telemarketing® magazine, it has always provided the most authoritative information about practically every aspect of the call center/CRM industries. Indeed, along the way, this publication was called "The Bible of the Industry" by The Wall Street Journal.

As the industry evolved, the title of the publication changed to be more in line with the growth and the new nature of the industry. Currently, we believe that Customer Interaction Solutions® is a more appropriate name for our industry. After all, with all due respect to the emergence of online media, the telephone continues to play a vital role in practically every aspect of the business.

A major question that one should ask is, given that the industry is now practically 26 years old, since the inception of this publication, why and for what reason does the industry continue to grow every year? In order to focus on this vitally important topic, we decided to conduct a far-reaching industry survey by asking some crucial questions of several industry-leading companies. Among the many questions we asked were the following:

Question 1: In your judgment, will the contact center industry grow by which of the following percentages?: 10 percent, 20 percent, 30 percent, or will not grow.

Indeed, in our survey, we received a wide array of differences of opinion on the growth of the industry. In fact, some leading industry manufacturers recently stated that they expect zero to flat growth rate, and several others indicated they expect between 20 to 30 percent growth annually for the present and the foreseeable future.

Question 2: What are the primary reasons for the rapid growth of the contact center/CRM industry in the U.S.?

The answer to this particular question was extremely important because we wanted to share with our valued readers why a relatively mature industry continues to grow in the views of some but not in others. We believe that the answer to this question is extremely crucial.

As I have indicated in a number of previous editorials, I believe that every company is a call center. As such, no company can exist without the telephone. If one understands this vitally important and basic part of business, one should never have any difficulty understanding why the industry has continued to grow for 26 consecutive years with no end in sight.

To provide a more comprehensive view about the above critical topics, we decided to contact several executives whose companies are among the leading providers of technology and teleservices to the call center/CRM industries in order to share with you many diverse points of views, not only because of the rate of growth, but also the reasons behind the continuous growth. In addition to all of the above, we also asked several other thought-provoking questions such as "What was the most important technology that you have used in 2007, which offered the greatest productivity, cost savings and profitability?" The answer to this particular question was indeed extremely revealing.

For your information, I would like to request that you refer to the article on page 11 titled, "Industry Leaders Share Their Views Regarding the Growth and Trends in the Contact Center/CRM Industries." This article will provide you with a comprehensive view offered by many industry leaders explaining every aspect of the growth and status and trends of our industry.

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

MARCH 2008 • VOLUME 26 • ISSUE 10

To receive free information from our premium advertisers, please visit freeinfo.tmcnet.com.

CONTENTS

IN EVERY ISSUE

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

4 **High Priority!**
By Rich Tehrani, Group Editor-in-Chief, Technology Marketing Corp.

8 **Customer Inter@ction News™**

8 **CallCenterComics.com**
By Ozzie Fonesca

40 **Awards & Recognition**
Customer Interaction Solutions Magazine's 23rd Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking

46 **The Integrated Marketplace™**

46 **Identification Statement**

46 **Advertising Index**

48 **Ask The Experts**
Irate Customers And How To Handle Them
By Tim Passios, Director of Product Management, Interactive Intelligence

INSIDER'S REPORT 44

44 The Top Five Things Your Call Center Agents Wish You'd Taught Them
By Penny Reynolds, The Call Center School

Correction

In our December 2007 Buyer's Guide issue, InfoCision Management Corporation (www.infocision.com) was inadvertently excluded from the Products/Services Listings.

InfoCision is an Akron-Ohio based teleservices provider that offers services in the following Buyer's Guide categories: inbound teleservices, interactive 800/900 service, multilingual teleservices, outbound teleservices and third-party verification services.

What's on the Cover 11

Industry Leaders Share Their Views Regarding The Growth And Trends In The Contact Center/CRM Industries
By Nadji Tehrani, CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.

CRM, BPO & TELESERVICES 11

11 Industry Leaders Share Their Views Regarding The Growth And Trends In The Contact Center/CRM Industries
By Nadji Tehrani, CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.

14 International Call Center Best-Practices: A White Paper
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

15 The Top 10 Outbound Telemarking Campaign Mistakes
By Christopher M. Carrington, CEO, Alpine Access & TMCnet Columnist

16 PCI Compliance: What It Means To The Call Center Industry
By Mark Swanson, Tele Resources, Inc. and TMCnet Special Guest

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION 18

18 One Bad Apple: Call Center Recording Is Essential For Weeding Out Agents Who Harm The Customer Relationship
By Susan Campbell, Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

CALL CENTER TECHNOLOGIES 20

20 The Call Center Customer Of The Future
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

24 Listening To A Vision Of Speech In The Future: A Moment With Loquendo's New CEO
By Stefania Viscusi, Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

28 The Growth Report For Contact Center Applications
By David Sims, Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

30 A Shake Up Of The Enterprise Market
By Patrick Barnard, Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM THE EXPERTS 32

32 IP Communications For The Contact Or Call Center
By Eric Eckman, Broadvox

32 Handling Spikes In Call Volume
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

34 Egypt: A Rising Star Of An Outsourcing Destination
By Xceed

34 Searching For Greener Call Center Fields
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

36 Contact Centers That Take Millions Of Calls Keep Them Short, Make Happy Callers — And Never Go Down
By Brad Schorer, VoltDelta

36 On-Demand: The Key Driver Of Growth For Contact Centers
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions

38 Fewer Headsets And Fewer Hassles
By Joe McGrogan, Plantronics, Inc.

Autonomy
etalk

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

Autonomy etalk surpasses traditional approaches to call center automation by understanding the meaning hidden inside customer conversations and emails. Our Intelligent Contact Center solutions automate the capturing, analysis and sharing of valuable customer information. An industry leader with a $4.2 billion market cap, Autonomy might just be your biggest surprise.

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

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

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

End-to-End SIP In The Contact Center

I recently got a chance to speak with Avaya's (News - Alert) Vice President and General Manager of its Customer Service Applications Division, Jim Smith, about Avaya's launch of their Communication Manager 5.0 solution, which the company has positioned as a more cost-efficient and reliable way to implement end-to-end SIP in the contact center. He and I talked at length about how SIP can effect a whole host of improved efficiencies in contact center operations.

RT: You've positioned the announcement as allowing companies to offer "faster service with a personal touch." Can you explain what you mean by "personal touch"?

JS: Customers interact with businesses for a variety of reasons. They could be seeking information, shopping for a new service, trying to solve a problem, seeking an update, exploring additional products or services the business can deliver — the possibilities are endless. Whether a customer is reaching out via phone, e-mail or chat, Avaya offers solutions to ensure that each customer is matched with the associate best suited to meet their needs, every time. Caring for these customer relationships means going beyond an immediate, informed response to their phone call or e-mail — it means proactively reaching out to them with information they want and need. For example, if a customer always checks that a deposit has been made on a monthly or quarterly basis, proactively provide them with validation of that deposit.

Each person's preference for interacting with a company is fluid in today's world. Accordingly, Avaya offers multiple ways for customers to collaborate with businesses. An interesting and unique personalization that is emerging is the use of video to create a face-to-face interaction, enabling companies to deliver personalized service even when their "front line" is unavailable to assist. For example, our video kiosk solution enables companies to serve customers immediately even if all sales resources are busy. When someone walks into the door of a cell phone service provider, or into a home improvement store, for example, they can walk up to a video kiosk and immediately get face-to-face assistance from a knowledgeable agent serving them from a centralized contact center. This type of personalized customer service is what keeps customers happy and keeps them from walking out the door and into a competitor's store.

RT: Where do the majority of cost savings come from for companies that switch to the solution?

JS: One area where we deliver significant cost savings while helping businesses deliver an exceptional customer experience is with our Customer Service Editions. This full-service enterprise contact center suite offers solutions for intelligent routing, proactive customer contact, self-service and operational performance. Customer Service Editions enable companies with complex business needs to deliver the right level of access, convenience and personalization that are essential to nurturing customer relationships and building repeat business — to help companies provide a level of customer service that truly differentiates them from their competitors.

Additionally, SIP provides not only added flexibility, but new opportunities for cost reduction as well. SIP can simplify environments and make it much more cost-effective for enterprises to respond to changing customer preferences and business opportunities. The flexibility inherent in SIP enables new options for Avaya customers. We can deliver SIP to the agent desktop through existing CTI (News - Alert) applications such as Avaya Interaction Center. Alternatively, customers can now use SIP end-to-end from the network to the agent desktop without requiring CTI middleware, enabling some companies to simplify their operations by eliminating complex legacy CTI systems and the maintenance and operating costs associated with them. And, with the new solutions Avaya delivered in January, businesses are lowering costs by using high-capacity SIP trunks and new low-cost SIP gateways to reduce hardware requirements. They're reducing servers and complexity with new platforms that provide both communications and SIP/presence in a single server. New purpose-built SIP agent endpoints

TMCnet™

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

IT Growth Threatened By Shortage Of Domestic Talent

By Susan Campbell, Contributing Editor, TMCnet

Business growth in a variety of sectors is being threatened as a result of a new shortage of skills and talent in IT and business. According to recent Gartner research, traditional technical IT skills will not suit the burgeoning demand for developing IT and business together. Specific challenges exist domestically as Baby Boomers are nearing retirement, younger generations view IT as an unattractive career choice, especially when it involves a help desk or contact center situation.

Read the article at www.tmcnet.com/1682.1

Datamonitor Report: Convergys First, But Unlikely Last, To Pull Call Centers Out Of Canada

By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, TMCnet

A new report from market research firm Datamonitor shows what many of us already know: Companies are starting to pack up and relocate their Canada-based call center operations due to the increasing value of the U.S. dollar and the increasingly unfavorable exchange rate. Even call center outsourcing behemoth Convergys has announced that it will be closing some of its facilities in Canada in the coming months – this news coming directly from the mouth of Convergys CEO David Dougherty.

Read the article at www.tmcnet.com/1683.1

Who Ranks Tops In E-Commerce?

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

You may have your personal preferences and pet peeves, but do you know who is really tops across the board when it comes to giving customers what they want? Think ketchup. And then think about Amazon. According to a survey released recently conducted by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and the University of Michigan with e-commerce partner ForeSee Results, customer satisfaction with e-commerce is at an all-time high

Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1684.1

Unveiling the industry's best kept secret!

In the past **15 years Altitude Software** has partnered with companies worldwide to deliver the most successful contact centers. In **60 countries, over 170 000 agents** are using our cutting edge contact center suite, and yet, it seems that **we are the best kept secret in the industry**!

Altitude's uCI™ (unified customer interaction) modular architecture has been built from the ground up to work together, enabling a non invasive implementation and **a best of suite set** of contact center functionalities.

Altitude uCI™, a next generation customer communications solution, running natively over IP and PBXs, offers a full contact center suite including:

- ☑ IP multimedia routing,
- ☑ compliant outbound campaigns,
- ☑ smart agent desktops,
- ☑ real time monitoring,
- ☑ quality management,
- ☑ staff scheduling,
- ☑ historical reporting.

www.altitude.com

callus@altitude.com | toll-free: +877 474-4499

altitude software

Altitude uCI™ has not gone unnoticed by several market analysts and the industry media; we have received more than 30 awards.

lower costs at the agent desktop. Basically, SIP delivers new ways to enrich the contact center with presence capabilities, while lowering the costs of providing premier customer service.

RT: What sort of KPIs (key performance indicators) might the solution help contact centers improve?

JS: Traditional measures of contact center performance are making way for new metrics as companies begin to look for ways to tie contact center performance to business results. Avaya demonstrates leadership in this space with patent-pending reporting and analytical technologies that link what is happening in the contact center with broader business goals. Managers across the enterprise are able to choose the KPIs that meet their specific needs — whether they are directly managing agents, managing one location, are responsible for the entire contact center across the enterprise, or are a line of business owner.

Let's look at a couple of example of how metrics are changing. Historically, contact center managers may have looked at individual agent metrics in isolation. Today, our agent behavior reporting enables contact center managers to easily assess — in one view — whether agents are meeting targeted KPIs, whether that is within an individual group, by location or across the enterprise. In each instance, the manager is able to immediately drill from the big picture down into supporting details. Another example: contact center managers have long been focused on average talk time, and have encouraged agents to minimize talk time in order to contain the cost of agent salaries. But, in a revenue-generating contact center, what if you were easily able to combine talk time with revenue results? You might learn that an agent who tends to exceed average talk time by 20 percent, for example, is consistently bringing in double the revenue of other agents. In the past, looking at talk time as a KPI without having the information to link it with the business value, you would have chastised this agent. Now that you have the complete picture, you see that this agent is a role model! Combining talk time with business results is one example of next-generation KPIs that give companies the ability to ensure they are maximizing agent productivity while delivering premier customer service.

RT: The solution allows contact centers to offer "dynamic video content"?

JS: Dynamic video content is the ability to provide live video customer interaction or selectively stream video to video-enabled devices.

RT: Do you currently have any users who are offering such video content? Who and what kind of content?

JS: The explosion in video content on the Web is starting to change consumer expectations of this new media. Some of our early adopter customers are beginning to explore rich media applications and services to reach and retain customers. We have several customers evaluating and in various stages of implementing video-based customer service strategies. We soon look forward to working with them to publicize their successes but cannot provide their names at this time.

RT: Can you expound a little on the Avaya Interactive Voice and Video Response component? What is it and how are customers using it?

JS: IVVR is synonymous with the above customer use cases. While live customer to agent video customer service is a long-term future for most organizations, there are some today leveraging media independent platforms like Avaya Voice Portal as a basis for delivery of richer, more powerful self-service experiences that combine natural language speech recognition with visual queues like video and images.

An example scenario is servicing the needs of mobile device users through integrated voice and video. A satellite TV provider we are working with wants to offer their customers the ability to order movies and other pay-per-view content over a user's 3G video-enabled device. The user makes selections while talking to an agent who selectively can stream videos of the latest movie trailers to her device and order movies. The movie is then downloaded to the customer's satellite TV set-top box for viewing that evening.

Users receive faster service, confirm transactions more quickly, and are more engaged with video versus the traditional "music on hold" call treatment. Businesses benefit from more powerful visual branding, cross-sell/upsell and support.

RT: What functional benefits will SIP bring to a contact center?

JS: SIP, at its most basic level, is merely a mechanism to deliver additional capabilities and benefits to the end customer. With the simplicity and flexibility gained by using SIP, contact center managers are able to more quickly meet the dynamic requirements of their customers. When a contact arrives, not only do we know who is calling, but with the capabilities inherent in SIP architecture we have the surrounding customer context without requiring a complex, costly CTI application to deliver this information. Yet another benefit delivered by SIP technology is that of customer interactions enhanced with video. Since each contact arrives with context-sensitive information, when a customer contacts your business via an endpoint with display capabilities, a rich new set of possibilities come into play. Now self-help menus are no longer driven strictly by touch-tone or voice, but can include a display showing the available options. Customers who call from a cell phone or PDA and are waiting in queue can be shown related products and services via video, enhancing the company's opportunities for cross-sell and upsell while improving customer satisfaction. These instances of expanded functionality are only a few of the plethora of options delivered by SIP. Essentially, the appeal of SIP is that it can improve the ease of operation of your contact center at a substantially lower cost of ownership, simultaneously offering exciting new capabilities.

RT: How will presence, multimedia-based benefits of SIP be used?

JS: Avaya introduced SIP and presence into the contact center over two and a half years ago, with integrated presence at the agent desktop. This enables an agent to immediately see who is "present" to assist — whether that expert is an agent or supervisor in the contact center, or a resource elsewhere in the enterprise. Agents are now able to instantly get the answers they need, driving first-call resolution and increasing customer satisfaction. SIP will continue to deliver new options for self-service. Envision a financial services customer going to the company's Web site, and launching a chat session to ask a question. If there is a particular broker that the customer would like to work with, perhaps they could see the presence status of the broker, see that she is busy, and then make a decision — based on presence status of that broker — to either try later or choose another available broker. **CIS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS • AD INDEX

All-In-One

OR

All-the-servers-you've ever-seen-in-your-life

THE CONTACT CENTER

ENTERPRISE IP TELEPHONY

ENTERPRISE MESSAGING

Look in your server room and they go on forever, all those servers, racks, switches and cooling fans. Not a pretty picture, so picture this. One platform, one application suite and one administration interface, coming together on one network, for every communication function in your contact center. We call our work of art "All-in-one."

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

Every Friday, 1:00 EST

Visit *www.inin.com/ads/all-in-one* for more information and to register online.

www.inin.com

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®

Deliberately Innovative

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION NEWS

www.tmcnet.com/1551.1

Marketplace Still Receptive To Oracle (News - Alert) Fusion

The Oracle Applications Users Group (OAUG) has announced that a majority of Oracle-based enterprises intend to upgrade to Oracle's Fusion middleware infrastructure within the next two years. The purpose of the survey was to measure the attitudes of users of Oracle's major enterprise platforms, including Oracle E-Business Suite, PeopleSoft and Siebel, toward Oracle's Fusion middleware solutions.

www.oracle.com

www.tmcnet.com/1552.1

Teleservices Firm PRC LLC Files For Bankruptcy

PRC LLC, a Plantation, Florida-based provider of teleservices, filed for bankruptcy protection on Wednesday, January 23, 2008. The company operates several call centers in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and four other Iowa cities. The company has indicated that it plans to continue operating as usual during the Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization and does not plan to close any call centers or lay off any staff for the time being.

www.prcnet.com

www.tmcnet.com/1553.1

Tuvox Recruits New CEO, Chairman of the Board

Speech applications provider TuVox announced this week the appointment of two industry veterans: Mark Lazar as CEO and Sam Spadafora (News - Alert) as Chairman of the Board of Directors. Both men were recruited, in part, for their experience building companies that have gone through an IPO, as well as managing growth through acquisition. TuVox's (News - Alert) next phase of expansion is expected to combine growth of the existing TuVox On Demand business with the acquisition of complementary companies and products.

www.tuvox.com.

www.tmcnet.com/1561.1

Astute Solutions Offering RealDialog Agent Assist

Astute Solutions has announced the expansion of its RealDialog product family with the launch of RealDialog Agent Assist, which was designed to enable contact center agents to more quickly deliver consistent, accurate and personalized responses. According to the company, the solution is capable of addressing issues and questions of varying degrees of complexity in a conversational manner.

www.astutesolutions.com

www.tmcnet.com/1555.1

CRM, Enterprise Vendor Epicor Announces Expanded Support, Capabilities

Epicor|CRS, the Retail Solutions Division of Epicor Software (News - Alert), recently announced new capabilities and expanded support. CRS RetailStore, Epicor|CRS's point-of-sale product, now offers more capabilities to sell to retailers doing business internationally. Additionally, the company plans to expand its Bracknell, UK office and add a new professional services and support center in Malaysia. As a result of the company's acquisition by parent company Epicor Software in late 2005, Epicor|CRS has expanded into the international retail markets in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia Pacific.

www.epicor.com

www.tmcnet.com/1556.1

Active CRM Releases Latest Version

Active Modules has released the latest version of its customer relationship management application, Active CRM. Highlights of the improved features include sales and marketing enhancements, such as now giving invoices custom fields, and the ability to track payment history and status. The product can automatically capture lead information from a Web site and comes with what company officials describe as "advanced workspace and calendar features," which lets users maintain a universal event calendar for the whole organization, keep all employees up-to-date on tasks, meetings or holidays and create personal events and keep them private.

www.activemodules.com

www.tmcnet.com/1557.1

Tango Networks (News - Alert) Delivers Voice Call Continuity Solution For Enterprise Market

Tango Networks has announced that it has enhanced the functionality of its Abrazo product line with Voice Call Continuity (VCC) functionality, which facilitates seamless hand-off of voice calls between disparate networks, as well as seamless hand-off in both directions, from WiFi (News - Alert) to mobile and vice versa, with automatic selection of the best network to use.

www.tango-networks.com

www.tmcnet.com/1558.1

ASC Announces VoIP Recording For Cisco (News - Alert)

ASC, a provider of solutions to record, analyze and evaluate communications, has announced a new version of its VoIP recording solution, EVOip for Cisco. The company recently announced EVOip 8.0, a new VoIP recording solution with additional channel capacity and compatibility with a wider range of IP phone systems. EVOip for Cisco records all customer interactions in Cisco environments. It was certified through the Cisco Technology Developer Program and is compatible with any version of the Cisco Unified Communications (News - Alert) Manager (UCM).

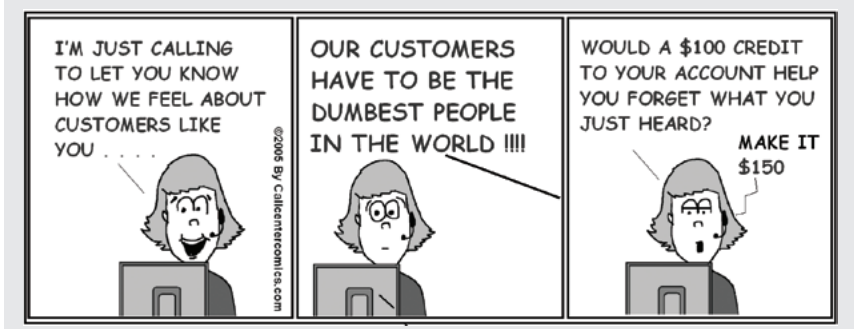
www.asctelecom.com

www.tmcnet.com/1559.1

Customer Relationship Metrics To Launch Second WFM Study

Contact center research company Customer Relationship Metrics, L.C., has announced that it is set to launch the second Workforce Management Practices Study endorsed by the Society of Workforce Planning Professionals (News - Alert). Several workforce management providers, including InVision Software, Verint and Calabrio, are actively offering support to the research. The project will be led by well known consumer scientist Dr. Jodie Monger, who is president of Customer Relationship Metrics.

www.metrics.net


I'M JUST CALLING TO LET YOU KNOW HOW WE FEEL ABOUT CUSTOMERS LIKE YOU . . . .
©2006 By Callcentercomics.com
OUR CUSTOMERS HAVE TO BE THE DUMBEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD !!!!
WOULD A $100 CREDIT TO YOUR ACCOUNT HELP YOU FORGET WHAT YOU JUST HEARD?
MAKE IT $150

www.tmcnet.com/1560.1

N.E.W. Acquires ServiceBench

N.E.W. Customer Service Companies, a provider of extended service plans and buyer protection programs for consumer products, announced the acquisition of ServiceBench, a provider of Web-based service management solutions for U.S. retailers and manufacturers. The acquisition is expected to afford NEW increased visibility into the entire service life cycle. The combined capabilities of NEW and ServiceBench is expected to help bring clients turnkey solutions for the development, implementation, and management of more comprehensive customer care and warranty programs.

www.newcorp.com

www.tmcnet.com/1562.1

Selltis (News - Alert) Offers New Version of its On-demand CRM Solution

On-demand CRM provider Selltis, LLC has announced the launch of its next-generation version of the company's namesake CRM solution, Selltis Sales 5.0, which is delivered via a hosted, software-as-a-service business model. Expanding on the company's proprietary Hyperrelational technology that offers "many-to-many" data linking, the new version allows users to proactively manage complex, team sales environments. The Selltis Sales platform includes tools to automate marketing campaigns and lead management as well as quoting and field service.

www.selltis.com

www.tmcnet.com1554.1

Loquendo (News - Alert) Improves Speech Recognition Engine

Speech recognition and text-to-speech provider Loquendo has announced the launch of its latest version of Loquendo ASR 7.5. The speech recognition engine now boasts a number of improvements and features to make it possible to more quickly and efficiently create and use advanced, complex speech. Available for both the Windows and Linux OS, and in the embedded version for all major embedded operating systems, ASR 7.5 was designed to make it much easier to deal with complex grammars and large vocabularies, and thanks to reduced grammatical nodes, and a redesign of recognition objects, enhances its overall performance.

www.loquendo.com

TMCnet
WEBINARS
www.tmcnet.com

Fill Your Sales Pipeline with Targeted Leads!

Market Your Company with Turn-Key Webinars!

Partner with TMC and make your next Webinar a lead generation machine.
Use the power of TMC's media outlets to drive attendance. Webinar benefits:

- Completely interactive – moderators ask and answer questions and fully engage the attendees
- Take advantage of TMC & TMCnet's marketing power
- TMC Webinars are complete turnkey events
- Up to one-hour long and you can determine the topic

Let TMC help you execute your next Webinar. Contact Rick Bisesto for details about how you can use the power of TMC publications and TMCnet to draw a large number of qualified attendees. 203-852-6800 ext. 211 or rbisesto@tmcnet.com.

FREE Webinar
Skills-Based Routing & Multi-skill Scheduling
IEX

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION NEWS

www.tmcnet.com/1685.1

Customer Effective, Inc. Partners With SalesCentric

Customer Effective, Inc., a Microsoft (News - Alert) Gold Certified Partner and value-added reseller of Microsoft Dynamics CRM, recently announced a partnership with SalesCentric to offer its customers Relationship Charts, an add-on for Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Relationship Charts were developed by SalesCentric to complement Microsoft Dynamics CRM software with easy-to-use, visual tools that improve sales performance, forecast accuracy and marketing effectiveness.

www.salescentric.com
www.customereffective.com.

www.tmcnet.com/1686.1

Protech Adopts MadCap Software For Real-Time Customer Feedback

Multichannel content authoring software provider MadCap Software announced that Protech Associates has adopted MadCap Feedback Server. Protech is using the Web 2.0 capabilities of the Feedback Server to track use of its MadCap Flare-based documentation and get real-time customer feedback. Additionally, Protech has directly integrated Feedback Server into its own software to bring customers and Protech developers together in a common community. MadCap Feedback Server replaces an earlier solution used by Protech, which provided only basic tracking functionality.

www.madcapsoftware.com

www.tmcnet.com/1687.1

Software As A Service CRM For Electronic Records Compliance

In another demonstration of how CRM can help industries outside the call center, Verticals onDemand, which provides pharmaceutical software-as-a-service CRM solutions, announced its VBioPharma Primary Care Edition CRM application for life sciences organizations. According to the company, the product is the first CRM application pre-validated for PDMA and the Food and Drug Administration's CFR Part 11 compliance, which defines the criteria under which the FDA considers "electronic records, electronic signatures and handwritten signatures executed to electronic records to be trustworthy, reliable and generally equivalent to paper records and handwritten signatures executed on paper."

www.verticalsondemand.com

www.tmcnet.com/1688.1

GroupWise Integration For SugarCRM Available From Omni

Riva GroupWise Integration for SugarCRM was announced recently by Omni Technology Solutions, (News - Alert) Inc., offering customers with SugarCRM's information on Blackberry, Web and desktop clients. With the Riva GroupWise Integration for SugarCRM, users are provided with transparent, server-side synchronization between GroupWise and SugarCRM (News - Alert) Community Edition, Professional Edition and Enterprise Edition for both on-site and hosted on-demand versions.

www.omni-ts.com

www.tmcnet.com/1689.1

Broadlook Technologies Partners With InfusionCRM

Marketing software provider Infusion Software (News - Alert) has announced a new partnership that brings together their InfusionCRM software solution with Broadlook Technologies, a provider of lead generation and recruiting software solutions. InfusionCRM offers sales and marketing automation for small businesses that also improves customer management. InfusionCRM brings together direct response marketing, eCommerce and small business management all in one system.

www.infusioncrm.com

www.tmcnet.com/1690.1

Maximizer Rounds Out Maximizer CRM 10 Suite With Entrepreneur Edition

Maximizer Software Inc. has released the Entrepreneur Edition of Maximizer CRM 10 – thus rounding out its CRM software suite with a new edition targeted at the small business. Maximizer CRM 10 already covered the SMB market with its Group, Professional and Enterprise Editions. Now, with the introduction of the Entrepreneur Edition, the suite has an edition for every size business (including departments within a larger organization), from small to medium to large to enterprise.

www.maximizer.com

www.tmcnet.com/1691.1

Voxify Receives $15 Million In Venture Capital

Voxify, which offers speech-enabled self-service solutions for the contact center industry, has received $15 million in venture capital which it will use to expand its portfolio of solutions as well as to boost its partner ecosystem. Leading the funding round is new investor Intel Capital (News - Alert), along with existing investors El Dorado Ventures, Palomar Ventures and Sigma Partners. Voxify's self-service solutions or "automated agents" employ advanced speech recognition software, which facilitates natural dialog with callers.

www.voxify.com

www.tmcnet.com/1692.1

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

Software-as-a-service CRM provider CRM ASP has announced the availability of Vonage VoIP services fully integrated in the CRM platform. Available immediately, Vonage integration brings small businesses full integration with Free CRM and CRM ASP licensed products, providing one-click calling and automating phone dialing and outbound sales campaigns with Vonage. CRM ASP provides CRM solutions to over 75,000 companies and 90,000 subscribers.

www.freecrm.com

www.tmcnet.com/1694.1

Convergys (News - Alert) To Open New Philippines Facility

Teleservices giant Convergys Corporation announced that its new integrated contact center in Bacolod City, Philippines, will be operational in April. Construction is nearing completion on the site, a new build-to-suit facility that is located in the San Antonio Park Square in Barangay Mandalagan. Training for the first 100 new hires is underway. The new state-of-the-art contact center, encompassing more than 3,000 square meters with room for expansion, will have approximately 500 new employees at opening, and Convergys hopes to create another 500 new jobs in Bacolod City by the end of 2008. With this new facility, Convergys will have nine of the largest, multi-client, U.S.-owned contact centers in the Philippines.

www.convergys.com

www.tmcnet.com/1695.1

Verizon Business (News - Alert) Offers Hosted IVR Service In Europe

Verizon Business recently announced that it has expanded the availability of its Hosted Interactive Voice Response (IVR) service to the European market. Targeted at organizations with large or geographically dispersed contact center operations, Verizon Hosted IVR is a fully managed, advanced voice response service that enables organizations to improve contact center efficiency and enhance overall customer satisfaction. Verizon Hosted IVR aims to maximize the potential of the network, ensuring that there is always sufficient capacity to handle customer calls, even when call volumes are high. Customer enquiries are directly routed to the appropriate agent while call transfers are set up on a network level, preventing infrastructure congestion and reducing costs.

www.verizonbusiness.com

by Nadji Tehrani,
CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.

Industry Leaders Share Their Views Regarding The Growth And Trends In the Contact Center/CRM Industries

Once a year, the editorial staff of *Customer Interaction Solutions* conducts a roundtable interview of industry leaders as a way of assessing the growth and prospects of the call/contact, CRM and teleservices industries. This year, we asked Interactive Intelligence, InfoCision Management Corp., Aspect Software, Oracle, Autonomy (News - Alert) etalk, Verint Witness Actionable Solutions and IEX Corp. to provide us with their valuable opinions on the direction of the industry. We're happy to share with you, our valued readers, these companies' expert opinions.

First, companies were asked, "In your judgment, by what percentage is the contact center industry expected to grow, and what is the reason for this growth?"

Interactive Intelligence (News - Alert): We anticipate worldwide contact center industry growth between four and eight percent; we expect North American growth between three and four percent. Due to current economic conditions, we expect the collections industry to help drive market growth. In addition, we expect a continued increase in the use of remote agents driven by cost-savings, improved business continuity, a broader labor pool, and increased agent retention as a result of more flexible and convenient work conditions.

InfoCision Management Corp: 20 percent. At InfoCision, we are projecting close to 20 percent growth for ourselves over the next year, and that's really the only way we can gauge how much the industry will grow. We believe that other firms that are focused on high-quality service should grow as well.

We have seen a refocus around the important concept of quality. Companies are beginning to realize that simply choosing the lowest priced provider from RFP responses does not translate into a total lower cost with sufficient customer satisfaction. Offshore call centers are generally not providing the quality of service that most firms require, in terms of keeping customers and being productive. So we're seeing more Fortune 100 companies outsourcing to top-tier providers here in the U.S. to provide them with the highest return on investment.

Oracle: 20 percent. CRM is growing at an average of eight to 10 percent currently and the focus on contact center extensions to include infrastructure transition to software-as-a-service offerings will drive customers to consider a larger solution when implementing new solutions. Aging applications are going to need to be replaced requiring additional investment – driving the investment to exceed the averages in CRM.

There is a resurgence of customer satisfaction as a measure of customer value expected as the competition for revenue becomes more acute due to an anticipated economic downturn. Companies tend to invest more heavily in service solutions during these lean times to preserve the existing customers and highlight the value of customers to prospective customers. As this is a global trend, the investments should rise globally, and not only in the Americas.

Additionally, the significant contact center consolidations and leveraged outsourcing continues to drive investments in standard infrastructures that provide flexibility to companies when reconfiguring their service organizations should play a role in the growth of the technology investments.

Aspect (News - Alert) Software: Less than 10 percent. Datamonitor expects the global contact center market to grow from $5.6 billion in 2007 to $6.6 billion in 2010 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.2 percent. During the same period, The North American contact center market is expected to grow from $2.5 billion to $2.7 billion showing a CAGR of 3.5 percent.

We are expecting modest to almost flat growth for the contact center industry in the U.S. Most of the growth we expect to see will be around VoIP deployments and the implementation of unified and performance optimization solutions. VoIP is a viable option for contact centers now with the growing adoption of session initiation protocol (SIP) and standards-based technology. This reflects a huge shift in the industry from proprietary, closed standards to open standards and this will impact the growth of the contact center industry. Contact centers are looking for solutions that will provide them with more flexibility and control over their contact centers and the ability to deliver a better customer experience. This is a key reason why unified solutions that include all major contact center applications, like an ACD, dialer, voice portal, Internet contact, reporting, routing and administration in a single platform, are increasingly gaining traction in North American contact centers. In addition, performance optimization solutions are giving contact centers a better view into how they can improve and streamline contact center operations and get an edge over the competition.

Verint (News - Alert) Witness Actionable Solutions: 15 percent. Increasingly, companies are recognizing the strategic value and critical business intelligence that comes through its most customer-facing channel: the contact center. More and more, these centers are being viewed and recognized as vital information sources, strategic assets, key branding channels and insightful sources for product and service feedback, as well as relationship building. Organizations with IP infrastructures (also on the rise) and those that share customer intelligence with the back office and other areas of the enterprise that impact the customer experience can help make companies more customer-centric in their approach, their processes and their investments. We see this a lot in the workforce optimization market we serve.

At our May 2007 Driving Innovation event, the Verint Systems annual customer conference, a survey of attendees showed that more than half of respondents reported their organizations share interactions with departments and/or groups outside of the contact center.

Executive management, marketing and product management ranked the highest among those groups. This is a sign that companies are moving to a more integrated way of working cross-departmentally — sharing customer intelligence, uncovering business trends, discovering the root cause of employee and customer behavior and powering the right decisions — to help ensure service excellence and achieve continuous performance improvement across every aspect of customer care operations.

The move to IP telephony by a growing number of organizations is one key factor. The rise of the knowledge worker and home-based customer service agents, enabled by IP, is another growing trend in the contact center industry. Additionally, continuing to make customer service easily accessible is a driver; i.e., the contact center – versus storefronts – have helped create a quick avenue for customers to check balances, return status, etc.

Autonomy etalk: 10 percent. With the current business environment and U.S. presidential campaign underway, businesses will likely be more cautious regarding expansion and development. For 2008, businesses utilizing an outsourcing model will evaluate this model to determine if the expected ROI and customer experience have been delivered.

With the rapid growth of contact centers in Asia and India over the past few years, we anticipate a concentrated effort on cultural education and people development rather than expansion in traditional contact centers. Instead, businesses will focus on providing consumers with new communication and self-service channels in the upcoming year and supporting customer service through those channels.

Organizations that used the outsourcing model based on expense savings are either moving those functions in-house or utilizing U.S.-based outsourcers. We will continue to see the movement of contact center work from overseas to U.S. shores for more efficient quality management and to counteract the negative impact some foreign service centers have had on the customer experience. With this influx of work, there will be some potential growth of brick-and-mortar contact centers, but the growth, economic appeal, technological capabilities, and flexibility of at- home agents will definitely increase.

IEX (News - Alert) Corp.: 10 percent, based on market experience and a review of various WFO reports.

Additional factors:

- Consolidation at the top-end of the market continues to drive product innovation and end-user refinements;
- Continued growth of the sales into the small-to-mid sector;
- Expansion of the contact center technology into non-traditional environments such at work-at-home and outbound; and
- More widespread adoption of IP technology.

For the next question, companies were asked, “What, in your opinion, is the greatest technological need of the call/contact center industry at the moment?”

Interactive Intelligence: Continued adoption of open standards that help promote more flexible communications options.

InfoCision Management Corp.: The most critical need throughout the contact center industry is to create a consistent and high-quality experience for customers. If something works well, a teleservices firm should focus efforts to maximize the benefits of the existing technology and make improvements to it. Constantly adopting new technologies just because they promise bigger and better things can ultimately backfire. Training costs increase and employee frustrations can mount. Instead, companies should focus their efforts on customizing solutions for clients to improve the customer experience.

Oracle: Transition of call switching to a software-based infrastructure and improved voice-driven technologies will continue to lead the innovation adoption curve for 2008 as seamless multichannel communications that enable the routing and redirection of customer contacts in context of their existing request continues to be widely implemented.

Aspect Software: With major software vendors like Microsoft lending credibility and stature to the subject, many companies are thinking about unified communications and what it means to their businesses. As a result, technology/applications that help support UC strategies will be in high demand in 2008 and beyond. Creating an enterprisewide strategy for UC is as much art as science, because the endeavor forces every company to ask (and answer) critical questions about internal business processes and workflows.

Verint Witness Actionable Solutions: The need for unified platforms is proving to take precedence. With a suite solution — and even more specifically, a unified framework — significant synergies develop among the previously disparate parts and its beneficial impact is profound. Today, industry experts are concluding that the customer service industry is maturing and that companies are demanding more integrated and robust software and services. Integrating separate best-in-breed solutions from multiple vendors is costly, not because the integration per se is terribly difficult to accomplish, but because integrated systems can be challenging to standardize, replicate and maintain over time. Through unified, single platform suites, customers can benefit from easier installation and implementation, and reduced learning curves and training expenses – all of which translate into lower cost of ownership and a faster return on investment. Couple that with solutions and services that draw on a structured upgrade path and single support organization, and users gain significant advantages.

There’s a great need for technology and business processes that help organizations improve the entire customer service delivery network — from contact centers to branch stores and remote offices to back-office operations. These departments and locations that also support the customer (either in person, or in the way of billing, order fulfillment and claims processing for instance) face some similar challenges that contact centers have in the past, but with a different twist. Workforce optimization is addressing those needs by taking proven solutions traditionally used in the contact center and applying them in new, innovative ways elsewhere in the enterprise.

Autonomy etalk: As businesses today face more and more regulations, from data security standards to industry compliance and risk management initiatives, they require technologies that can help them manage their data and meet the numerous requirements they are charged with both internally and via external influences. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP) is one regulation that is beginning to impact the way companies manage the data collected through the customer contact center, collections departments, and financial trading arenas. Information captured as voice interactions is now being targeted as Electronically Stored Information (ESI) for legal discovery and is a risk to any organization. Businesses that record calls for quality or compliance, especially those in highly litigious industries such as financial, insurance, and utilities companies, should invest in technologies that can automatically search, analyze, and retrieve data that are stored both within the enterprise and in any archived or externally stored information.

IEX Corp.: The contact center is under tremendous press to meet service goals and protect business value every time they interact with the customer. Therefore, the greatest need in the contact center is for tools that enable the center to achieve high performance. To do so, the center must be able to gain a unified view of its operation. But it must also be able to roll-up and drill-down from the enterprise, to the operation, to the agent level in order to uncover key market and business drivers. Advances in critical contact center solutions such as interaction analytics, workforce and performance management are making high performance achievable by changing the way the contact center is viewed and managed.

Next, companies were asked what was the most important technology they used in 2007.

InfoCision Management Corp.: We have been focused on a concept called server and desktop virtualization over the past few months. It is the concept of using one physical server computing resource to run multiple server or desktop sessions on the same hardware platform.

Virtualization has allowed us to consolidate several servers onto one physical piece of hardware, resulting in savings in racks, maintenance and energy. We have also seen the benefits of virtualization in development and testing due to the ability to create, use and reset virtual server images. If you include Microsoft's Terminal Services in a looser definition of virtualization, we have seen even more benefits by reducing the total-cost-of-ownership of desktops and the enablement of a home-based call-center workforce. In addition, we will significantly decrease the amount of space we need to use in our data center as we grow, as well as saving substantially on power consumption and cooling costs.

Oracle: Integration of best-of-breed solutions plays an important role in extending existing infrastructure investments and enabling adoption of newer technologies that drive greater customer satisfaction. Solutions that enable call center agents to more intelligently handle customer requests and resolve their issues sooner will greatly enhance productivity, cut costs and improve productivity. Look for integration of knowledge management solutions, dynamic queuing solutions that route customer inquiries to the "best resource" that resolves their solution, "next best offer" solutions, as well as the ability to transition investment to a soft telephony infrastructure that leverages VoIP and transitions from hard wired switches to a more dynamic software based infrastructure should lead contact center innovation for the next couple of years.

Aspect Software: In 2007, Aspect implemented Aspect Unified IP — a complete contact center product that unites automated call distribution (ACD), predictive dialing, speech-enabled voice portal, e-mail management, Web chat and collaboration, workflow management, recording and quality management — in its new global headquarters in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Aspect Unified IP exemplifies the company's unified approach — uniting inbound, outbound and blended multichannel contact in a highly scalable architecture that enables the single administration of as many as 15,000 agents.

Contact centers have great potential to be revenue-generating assets to modern-day businesses. However, as the industry has evolved, they now include a lot of enabling technologies that traditionally have been sold by separate vendors as individual components instead of as an integrated solution. Aspect Software recognized that a single platform designed to include all the key functional contact center components would be required. Aspect Unified IP not only leverages innovations like open standards to support critical customer-focused business processes, but it is also flexible enough to accommodate the unique business models of the variety of clients and vertical markets that the company serves.

Finally, roundtable participants were asked what, in their opinion, is the most important criteria in selecting a teleservices company.

InfoCision Management Corp.: The best, surefire way to see what a teleservices company is really made of is to visit its call centers and experience the reality of its operations. Anyone can create a fancy flyer or Web site to tout their services. But if you can physically watch agents while they work, you can tell a great many things about the company they work for. Do the agents have a passion for what they do? Do they have the experience and training to sound professional when speaking on behalf of your company? Are the agents mature adults who are supporting their families, or are they college kids who just need some money for pizza and beer this weekend? When you see the operations and company culture firsthand, you should know whether you want that call center firm representing your company.

Aspect Software: Companies should invest in (and demand) solutions and vendors that offer open standards such as SIP, MRCP, etc. Open standards are particularly valuable to companies because they deliver increased compatibility between components, enabling true interoperability. In doing so, they make it easier, faster and less expensive for companies to implement new and emerging technologies that have the power to greatly enhance customer experiences and improve customer loyalty. As open standards continue to mature, we will see the development of a number of new and innovative products and services using new standards, such as VoiceXML (News - Alert), SCXML, CCXML, which have been built on early protocol standards such as HTTP and SIP. **CIS**

The following companies assisted in the preparation of this article:

Aspect Software (www.aspect.com)

Autonomy etalk (www.etalk.com)

IEX Corp. (www.iex.com)

InfoCision Management Corp.
(www.infocision.com)

Interactive Intelligence
(www.inin.com)

Oracle (www.oracle.com)

Verint Witness Actionable Solutions
(www.verint.com)

TELEPHONE PERFORMANCE
ASSESSMENT SERVICES

- Remote Call Monitoring
- Telephone Mystery Shopping
- Detailed Call Analysis and Feedback
- Objective Observations and Measurement
- Custom Program Development
- Web-based Reporting

At Random
Communications

For more information:
1-800-993-6093
www.arllc.com
arc@arllc.com

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

International Call Center Best-Practices: A White Paper

Here's a great anecdote: At one international call center, an agent was (after a time) discovered to be ending each customer call with the words "I love you." When his supervisor finally intervened and asked him for an explanation, he stated that he had wanted to show customers that he cared. Which is great. However, most North American customers don't really enjoy spontaneous confessions of love by strange customer service representatives. Culture mismatch is one of the many reasons why a lot of offshore outsourcing projects don't succeed.

It wouldn't take you too long with a calculator and even ballpark figures to determine that offshoring your call centers could potentially be one of two things: a huge cost savings or one of the biggest expenses your company will ever face. So how do you make sure it's the former and not the latter? A new white paper by Mark W. Brodsky and Dina Vance of Ulysses Learning makes the point that following best practices in hiring, training and management is the number one tool in ensuring success for an offshore call center.

With today's increasingly uncertain economic forecast and the constant pressure to reduce costs, many companies have outsourced their call center operations to offshore or "near-shore" facilities like Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean. By offshoring, companies can save money and find a highly educated and skilled workforce. However, cultural differences, heavy accents, inadequate training and insufficient hiring practices can lead to poor customer satisfaction experiences, causing a loss of customer loyalty and ultimately, a loss in sales. The offshore outsourcing model is fraught with failed experiments. It's also full of success stories.

According to Ulysses Learning, when it comes to customer service, U.S.-based customers expect a certain level of customer experience. If the customer is calling to resolve a problem — a billing dispute, a malfunctioning item they purchased, to change travel reservations — that customer is often frustrated before he or she even picks up the phone. So when the customer reaches a customer service representative with an indecipherable accent who can't even solve their problem – requiring them to speak to a supervisor or worse, call back multiple times – customers become justifiably angry at the entire organization. Your organization. And the next time that customer makes a purchasing decision, it's likely he or she won't choose you.

So what's the answer? Training, training, training is the answer.

First, according to the white paper, it's important to understand why some offshore call centers have failed. The most obvious issue, states the paper's authors, is customer service reps with heavy accents and hard-to-understand names. Accent neutralization training and taking Western names can help overcome those challenges. But research also shows that if the agent is truly helpful, the significance of the accent dissipates.

Frieda Barry, President and Chairman of the Board at the Call Center Industry Advisory Council (CIAC) concurs. "We've all heard complaints and remarks about the accents of offshore agents. Interestingly, it's been our observation at the CIAC that when the agent creates a connection with a customer, the accent is irrelevant – it's a total non-issue. Regardless of where they're located in the world, most agents are smart and if properly trained and empowered, they can deliver a successful customer experience."

The deeper challenge is cultural, according to Brodsky and Vance. Many of the behaviors that Americans expect from a customer service representative are (literally and figuratively) foreign to international reps. U.S.-based customers expect a rep to offer empathy, ask thoughtful questions, use strong word choices and take control of the situation. However, in other countries, some of those traits are deemed offensive, which means that you can't expect an overseas rep to instinctively employ them.

According to Ulysses Learning, there are four key aspects to consider when creating the foundation for a successful offshore call center. They are:

1. Brand consistency
2. Hiring and recruiting practices
3. Training
4. Management

Brand Consistency

Regardless of where a call center is located, the average customer service agent typically handles 100 or more different customer calls per day. These busy people are the number one representatives of your company. So if you're going to entrust this to an offshore or near-shore call enter, you need to make sure they are managing your customers in an effective way that supports your brand. This can be accomplished through training.

Hiring And Recruiting Practices

Before staffing a call center, it's important to determine what you require in a call center agent in order to meet your customers' service expectations. While customer service skills such as empathy, questioning, listening and confidence can be learned in training, the right recruiting practices help ensure that your call center's reps have the core competency to deliver service and are more likely to "get" both the product and service skill cultural training.

Training

It's vital that training cover are product knowledge, technology and soft skills. With the right tools and learning skills, most customer service reps can readily learn a company's product. Technology training is another consideration. Depending on your product and actual call center tools, your agents will need a certain level of comfort and proficiency with technology and software. Another crucial aspect of training is the focus on the customer service skills and culturalization.

Management

A key benefit of offshoring is that an organization can significantly increase its staff- to manager-ratio because labor is cheaper overseas, allowing for higher supervisor to agent ratios. With extra management, agents can receive more feedback more quickly.

Ulysses Learning recommends a combination of simulation-based e-learning, facilitation and coaching. At many international call centers, the reps are learning along with the customers – a situation that risks of alienating customers and harming the company's brand. **CIS**

To read the full white paper with recommendations and guidance on training, visit www.tmcnet.com/1693.1

by Mark Swanso, TMCnet Special Guest,
Director of Business Development, Tele Resources, Inc.

Top 10 Outbound Telemarketing Campaign Mistakes

Telemarketing services are growing in popularity; however, it is safe to say that there are more and more telemarketing programs that are also failing to meet expectations. Following are 10 (OK, maybe 12) of the most common reasons that telemarketing programs fail.

Not establishing a goal. More people are returning to the telemarketing services industry to capitalize on a direct marketing tool with a proven rate of success. However, many do so without first really looking at what their ROI needs to be and how many sales or leads they need to generate to hit their ROI. Understanding these numbers is absolutely key to any and all telemarketing campaigns. One of the secondary problems is designing the program around untested goals, or goals that may essentially be too high — resulting in a poor test period. It is important to make sure that your goals are realistic and that telemarketing service providers can meet these expectations.

Not understanding the data. Telemarketing services can be one of the most intensive forms of data-driven direct marketing. Using telemarketing services also means that just by calling potential customers, agents are going to gather massive amounts of data. Outside of just the leads generated through telemarketing services there are numerous amounts of non-sales data that can be extremely valuable when looking at what can be successful with customers. One simple example is adding a refusal list to every calling campaign. Look at it this way: there are 8-50 different refusals per sale, depending on the difficulty of the offer. Each of those refusals has more than likely provided agents with a reason for their decline. These reasons can vary greatly, but they offer an opportunity to understand what potential customers are looking for as well as an indication of how to remarket certain leads.

Selecting a telemarketing service provider based only on price. Cost can be everything, and every dollar spent is a dollar taken off of the overall profit. The extra money being spent is only a problem when it does not improve the overall results of the telemarketing services campaign. Lower-priced telemarketing services providers often lower their costs so they can recoup them in other areas.

Moving the program overseas. This is not just coming from someone who works in the telemarketing services industry; this is coming from a person who is constantly frustrated by inbound and outbound telemarketing service efforts from people whom I cannot understand. At this point there is general understanding about offshore telemarketing service agencies, "If you can lose the customers, save the money."

Relying completely on scripting. The telemarketing services industry has a large number of diversified employees doing the same thing hundreds of times over and over each day. They should be pretty good at it, but there are shortcomings from time to time. In addition, because telemarketing services rely solely on the communication between two people, and people can be as unpredictable as they are predictable, it can be nearly impossible to have a proper response for every situation that arises. Telemarketing services customers can often have two very different approaches to the idea of scripting. One customer may prefer scripting everything. Others may look to train agents in the hopes that they are prepared to give the correct response in certain incidents that may arise on the phone. The best practice for this process is a combination of both.

Choosing only regional vendors. This is a problem that can often lead to choosing a vendor that is less qualified simply out of proximity. The reality is that being close to a telemarketing service provider is not going to make the program any more effective or productive.

Not visiting the service provider. Sometimes a quick look at a telemarketing vendor that you are considering can make all the difference. Are they really running with a 10:1 agent to supervisor ratio? Do they really have agents who are older and mature who have made a career out of the telemarketing industry or do they have high school students ready to call your customers? Also, this is a great chance to look at the environment where the calling is being done.

Improper set-up materials. The telemarketing services provider needs to have the right materials in order to design your program for telemarketing. Making sure the program is ready from day one is one of the best ways to ensure that the program will have the best success.

Not taking the time to understand the IT department. Call it what you like, IT, IS computer geeks, it does not matter, just make sure you know they what they do, and how they do it. From late reports to poor dialing algorithms, an incompetent IT department can significantly reduce the success of a telemarketing campaign.

Not following do-not call. At this point, it is most likely an obvious statement to say that it is important to make sure your telemarketing program is compliant with all federal and state do-not-call laws. Make sure to research the legalities of your telemarketing services program before it is dialed.

Not paying attention to quality assurance. Make sure to have a clear understanding of the goals and practices of the quality assurance department. QA processes can make or break the backend of a program. Quality assurance should ensure each sale made or lead generated is verified for accuracy and acceptance. In addition, it is important to see what QA is doing to improve the sales results by working with agents.

Not watching the results of the backend. Many groups that use telemarketing look only at the front end of a program and what the telemarketing group generated in sales or leads. However, they often ignore the payout rate of these customers or the dropout rate. Sometimes they even ignore the conversion rates with sales agents when generating leads. The bottom line here is that companies need to watch the results of what happens to the generated sales.

There are thousands of ways a telemarketing campaign can fail. Choosing a quality telemarketing services provider should be the most important part of the telemarketing process. Even choosing a good consultant to help with the telemarketing campaign may be a more profitable way to ensure success. **CIS**

For more information, visit the Telemarketing Services Channel on TMCnet at www.tmcnet.com/1696.1

by Christopher M. Carrington,
CEO, Alpine Access & TMCnet Columnist

PCI Compliance: What It Means To The Call Center Industry

It seems we read about it on a daily basis. Large-scale security breaches have happened to some of the most well known companies in the world, and they can happen to you. Hackers are finding new ways to collect massive amounts of consumer data and companies that inadvertently let this happen are paying for it — literally. Take TJX Companies, for example, the parent organization for T.J. Maxx and Marshalls. This company recently paid millions of dollars to settle a class action lawsuit for allowing one of the largest data breaches in history — 94 million credit card records over three years.

Dai Nippon Printing, SAIC, GAP and the Department of Veteran Affairs to name a few, all experienced large data breaches in 2007. As networks become more complex and thieves get smarter, protecting cardholder information is more important than ever. In response to an undeniable need for security education, direction and guidelines, the five major credit card brands (MasterCard, VISA, AMEX, DiscoverCard & JCB International) joined forces in September 2006 to create a standard for protecting cardholder information. Known as the PCI Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), this major compliance initiative details the steps needed to minimize the potential for fraud and reduce system exposure. A combination of security policies, technology and network changes, this standard is now mandatory for any merchant who accepts, captures, stores, transmits, or processes credit and debit card data. Companies not in compliance can face fines between $5,000 to $25,000 a month. In a corporate press release, Visa reported imposing $4.6 million worth of fines for non-compliance in 2006.

In my opinion, PCI compliance is a smart business decision, especially for call centers that regularly handle financial transactions. It provides confidence to clients and partners that their data are protected in the best possible way. Yet, despite all the evidence in favor of implementing strong security measures, there are still many organizations that have decided not to pursue compliance or have elected to meet just the bare minimum requirements. When selecting an outsourcing call center partner, companies must understand the level of certification, and thereby the level of protection, the call center provides them. It is also important to remember that certification is an ongoing process. Companies that claim PCI compliance at one point in time need to provide proof of established processes that will maintain compliance over the years.

Yet, despite all the evidence in favor of implementing strong security measures, there are still many organizations that have decided not to pursue compliance or have elected to meet just the bare minimum requirements.

PCI Certification

For a company to say it is PCI compliant it must prove that its infrastructure meets 12 major requirements broken into six sections called "control objectives." While each of these areas has numerous actions associated with it, the main objectives and requirements are as follows:

- Build and Maintain a Secure Network
  - Install and maintain a firewall configuration to protect data
  - Do not use vendor-supplied defaults for system passwords and other security parameters
- Protect Cardholder Data
  - Protect stored cardholder data
  - Encrypt transmission of cardholder data across open, public networks
- Maintain a Vulnerability Management Program
  - Use and regularly update antivirus software
  - Develop and maintain secure systems and applications
- Implement Strong Access Control Measures
  - Restrict access to cardholder data by business need-to-know
  - Assign a unique ID to each person with computer access
  - Restrict physical access to cardholder data
- Regularly Monitor and Test Networks
  - Track and monitor all access to network resources and cardholder data
  - Regularly test security systems and processes
- Maintain an Information Security Policy
  - Maintain a policy that addresses information security

To validate compliance, a Qualified Security Assessor (QSA) performs an audit. The amount of detail involved in this audit, or the number of specific criteria analyzed, depends on the type of merchant. While each credit card company has its own criteria for categorizing merchants, in general, the merchant level is based on the number of transactions performed. Obviously, the higher the transaction volume, the more data are at risk and, consequently, the more stringent the criteria are for obtaining certification.

The current merchant levels for VISA and MasterCard are:

- Level 1 – companies with transactions totaling 6 million and greater, per year.
- Level 2 – companies with transactions totaling 1–6 million, per year.
- Level 3 – companies with transactions totaling 20,000–1 million per year.
- Level 4 – companies with transactions totaling up to 20,000 per year.

To validate PCI compliance, Level 1 merchants must complete an annual onsite audit by a QSA and quarterly network security scans with an Approved Scanning Vendor (ASV). Level 2 and Level 3 merchants, in contrast, need only to complete a self assessment questionnaire along with the quarterly network scans. The difference in the amount of time and financial investment required for Level 1 versus Level 2 & 3 companies to obtain PCI certification is quite significant. As a Level 1 compliant company, I can tell you we made a large seven figure investment in accomplishing the validated certification and implementing ongoing processes!

The required commitment, money and dedication may be a large reason that many companies are either still in the process of meeting the standard or avoiding it altogether. According to data collected by VISA, 65 percent of Level 1 merchants and 42 percent of Level 2 merchants are currently PCI compliant even though the deadline for compliance has passed. Yet, failure to meet the standard can be a critical, costly mistake. A recent report from Solidcore Systems estimated that the cost for merchants and service providers not meeting the PCI requirements can be 20 times greater than the cost of proactively becoming compliant.

PCI and Call Center Operations

While the financial and retail industries initially pushed for the tighter security measures, data protection is now a critical issue for companies across the board. Table 1 (Source: Identity Theft Center) shows the number of reported breaches by industry.

The only way to be assured there are reasonable controls in place is if vendors meet the same standards as the merchants. One noncompliant company within a network can expose the other companies to risk. For this reason, most companies now won't consider working with a vendor, including a call center, that isn't 100 percent PCI compliant.

The process for call centers to meet PCI standards is time-consuming. It requires extreme attention to detail and the commitment of your entire organization. For brick and mortar centers, it is slightly easier because most of the infrastructure and data is on-premise. Virtual call centers using home-based customer service representatives face additional requirements due to the nature of a dispersed workforce. For example, information must be protected as it travels from the agent through the call center hub to the retailer applications. This involves securing thousands of home-office locations in addition to the corporate headquarters. While it is harder for virtual call centers become achieve validation of PCI compliance, companies that are well-run and organized with knowledgeable IT personnel can get the job done.

Meeting PCI standards isn't easy. Not only do you need to implement the appropriate measures, but you have to validate to a third-party assessor that everything is done correctly. On the other hand, much can be learned by going through the process and your organization will be stronger in the end. Handling sensitive personal information is serious business. The very nature of call centers requires trust from consumers, clients, partners and vendors. As call center executives, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect these data. These standards provide a roadmap for reducing risk to your systems and will give clients peace of mind knowing you've done everything possible to protect against fraud. Meeting PCI standards is not only critical for the success of your business; it's also the right thing to do. **CIS**

Christopher M. Carrington is President and CEO of Alpine Access, Inc., a Denver, Colorado-based provider of call center services using home-based customer service and sales employees. His column, Home Agent Happenings, appears on TMCnet.

Sector	Incidents	Affected Records
Retail	24	95,171,110
Services	17	8,901,455
Financial	39	8,793,719
State Government	58	5,948,395
Federal Government/ Military	22	4,017,163
Local/County Government	33	2,381,447
Health Care	56	1,027,462
Technology/Telecommunications	19	899,450
Higher Education	8	680,715
Miscellaneous	54	344,051
Secondary Education	25	85,527

Table 1

by Susan Campbell,
Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

One Bad Apple: Call Center Recording Is Essential For Weeding Out Agents Who Harm The Customer Relationship

We often talk about the importance of recording calls in the call center to ensure that agents are properly following scripts, to measure customer satisfaction and to assist in proper coaching and training of call center agents. Additionally, most call centers use call recording solutions to determine agents' and groups' performance for the purpose of merit raises or promotions. Increasingly, companies are using call recording in combination with analytics to draw out the most information possible from the interactions in order to determine what it is their customers are asking for and how they can better be served, and how call center operations procedures can be streamlined to save time and money. But one of the most critical functions of call recording/quality monitoring solutions is to identify those agents who are hurting the company overall, sometimes with just a single call.

I recently contacted the call center of a business-to-consumer technology company, as the wireless router that I had recently purchased from the company was not properly connecting to my system. I needed help and the information provided by the company clearly stated that if customer assistance was needed, the company's trained support staff was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Fat chance.

My first clue that the experience was not going to be as bright and shiny as promised was the frustrating trip through the IVR to try and get to an agent. This was my third time calling in, and I had already tried the suggestions provided by the various IVR menu choices I had selected. The warning that call waits were exceeding 20 minutes was not enough to deter me, as I was unable to find help at any of their other suggested locations – such as the company Web site.

Now, conventional wisdom would suggest that after waiting for a good 30 minutes to finally speak with a human customer service agent, I should be the frustrated one on the phone. Instead, I was greeted by a call center agent who was clearly annoyed that I had dared to call in and bother him on the job.

While I cannot say for certain that the company this individual was representing would cringe at the attitude its agent took with a customer on the phone, a recording of the call would have quickly identified the curt responses, impatient questions and complete lack of common courtesy.

In this situation, that is not all that a call center recording solution would have captured. When I had to ask this particular call center agent to slow down when he was providing me with an alternate number that I had to call (after waiting the aforementioned 30 minutes), I was actually hung up on.

I was flabbergasted. My response was somewhat delayed; I could not believe that any call center agent would actually hang up on a customer when it was (ostensibly) his job to provide quality customer service each and every time.

A robust call recording solution would have identified the problem with this agent and quickly enabled the call center manager to resolve the situation. And here is why this is essential for the call center: once I recovered from my surprise, I put the router back into its original packaging and immediately sent it back to the retailer from whom I had purchased it.

That company just lost a customer. Forever. Given the call center agent's disposition, I am quite sure I am not the first customer treated in this manner and likely not the first customer to be lost because of this "service."

The proper use of a modern call center recording/quality monitoring solution would have quickly identified this agent as extremely problematic and probably best suited for a position that does not require interaction with the customer base. (Buried deep in the company's mail room, perhaps.)

I, of course, have told many people about my experience. Will it make them less likely to do business with this company? Maybe. Will this one customer loss put the company out of business? Probably not. But unless this agent spoke to no one else but me all day (not a far-fetched proposition considering his miserable work ethic), the damage was far more widespread than just my account.

In years past, we've been busy telling call centers that do outbound telemarketing work that, given the fines they can incur for calling people on do-not-call lists, one rogue agent could cost them millions in just a few days.

The new conventional wisdom is that, if you're in a competitive business (and who isn't?) and you are not using quality monitoring solutions to be 100 percent sure that your agents are doing the best they can, that "one rogue agent" can sweep a trail of destruction across your valuable customer relationships.

Guess what? Your best customer is calling. Is your worst agent about to take the call? **CIS**

SENNHEISER
COMMUNICATIONS

SENNHEISER

Adaptive

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

www.sennheiserusa.com/adapt

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

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

The Call Center Customer Of The Future

We talk a lot about the call center/contact center of the future and what it might look like. Given that we sponsor a show called "Call Center 2.0," it's not surprising that we devote a lot of time to the topic. We regularly write about the next-generation contact center with its integrated workforce optimization, its ergonomics, its real-time reporting, its speech-recognition, its customer surveying and feedback mechanisms, its multifaceted analytics, its distributed and virtual nature, its hosted technologies and its home agents.

Tomorrow's Customers

What we seldom talk about, however, is the call center customer of the future, and this is significant, as the call center systems and infrastructure are merely there to serve the customers, and customers, as we know, are not always predictable. Expecting them to match their needs to the call center and e-commerce infrastructure is as poor a business strategy as deciding to make ice cream in only one flavor and expecting one's customers to be resigned to eating mango macadamia nut crunch for the rest of their lives. But it's not just the changing habits of consumers that need to be taken into consideration — it's the consumers themselves who are changing. As generations X, Y and whatever comes after them (generation Z? And where do we go after that — to the Greek alphabet?) matures and starts pulling in significant disposable income, how will companies seeking to service them have to adapt?

And why stop at young adults? According to a study from eMarketer (News - Alert), children between the ages of 8 and 14 — so-called "tweens" and young teens — are themselves a powerful demographic group online. They control billions in purchasing power and make up 60 percent of Internet users under age 18, according to the market researcher. Granted, it's allowance money, lawn-mowing money and babysitting earnings, but it's still significant, and its owners are eager to spend it.

Keep in mind, these are consumers who will have grown up interacting heavily with Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking, wikis, blogs, podcasting and social bookmarking. Static Web pages, disconnected media channels and two-dimensional shopping experiences will not cut it with them.

> **Expecting customers to match their needs to the call center and e-commerce infrastructure is as poor a business strategy as deciding to make ice cream in only one flavor and expecting one's customers to be resigned to eating mango macadamia nut crunch for the rest of their lives.**

"Good Enough" Is Not Good Enough

From an e-commerce perspective, it has become apparent that from year to year, what is "good enough" one holiday shopping season is laughably sub-par the next holiday season. Between rising expectations of customer service and technology, particularly among the aforementioned younger consumers, and more determination to get their money's worth out of a shopping experience, customers are quick to learn about what they don't like, what didn't work for them and what's missing from their shopping experience and are likely to drop that retailer like a proverbial hot potato forevermore. Loyalty to a particular company, particularly in the online arena, has gone the way of the Fuller Brush Man. (To prove it, ask the average 20-year-old what he or she knows about the Fuller Brush Man.)

Research Probes The Online Customer Experience

In its third annual "Holiday Shopping: Online Customer Experience Survey," research organization the e-tailing group, together with e-commerce company Allurent, sought to better understand consumer online shopping behavior and attitudes towards online retailers. They also touched on how expectations are evolving.

The 2007 survey revealed that, while consumers might be buying more online, their expectations, from a shopping and customer

KNOW MORE.
GO FAR.

DO YOU HEAR THE BUZZ? It's your customer community talking. About you. About your competitors. About what they want—and don't want. The real question is, are you listening? Vovici online communities and Enterprise Feedback Management solutions help you tap into that hive of information. Market insights. Customer opinions. *The next big idea.* At Vovici, we help you get the feedback you want, when you want it. And we do it better than anyone else. Are you ready to listen?

vovici™ Feedback that drives vision

1.800.787.8755 • vovici.com

service perspective, are also sharply on the rise. More than two-thirds of consumers affirmed that their expectations about the quality of their online shopping experience have increased since the 2006 holiday shopping season.

There were a couple of primary factors driving this assertion:

- Sixty-six percent of customers indicated that they understand that technology is constantly changing and improving and they expect that, accordingly, online shopping should also be getting better.
- Forty-six percent agreed that retailers that consistently advertise their Web sites should be investing in making those sites better than they were the previous year.
- Forty-one percent indicated that, since they have high-speed bandwidth, they expect to see more online stores better presenting products in a way that takes advantage of faster Internet connections.
- Twenty-nine percent identified themselves as familiar with interactive and visual sites, like Google (News - Alert) Maps or social networking site Facebook, and stated that they expect to see more online stores being innovative in the same manner as these sites.
- Young consumers' expectations are more influenced by Web 2.0-enabled sites, like Google Maps and Facebook (News - Alert). Nearly half of 18-to-24-year-olds cited these interactive Web experiences as the reason their expectations are rising. Successful e-tailers will need to learn how to better target this young group of consumers as they attain professional jobs and households and, as a result, their purchasing power, which is already significant, becomes more influential.

Consistent with the results of Allurent and the e-tailing group's two previous holiday surveys, the results proved that consumers do not differentiate between channels. In fact, nearly 40 percent of consumers revealed that a frustrating online experience would make them less likely to shop at that retailer's physical store. Sixty percent reported that when they have a frustrating shopping experience online, it negatively impacts their overall opinion of the retailer/brand. An overwhelming 80 percent would not return to the site after having a negative online shopping experience, meaning with most customers, retailers really do have only one chance to make a great first impression, to borrow an old dandruff commercial's schtick.

> **If a certain book is in stock, an e-mail auto-reply stating that "someone will get back to you in three to five business days, thank you for your query, we value your business" is, today, the equivalent of telling the customer, "Natter off, please. We're far too busy to worry about your stupid question."**

When asked to rate customer service features that are most important to them when buying online, nearly three-quarters of today's e-commerce consumers rated a perpetual shopping cart as an important feature, and 70 percent rated one-page checkout as an important feature, rather than having to click through multiple checkout pages. These two features were rated above other options such as access to a toll-free telephone number, available live help and accessible contact information. When results were segmented by gender, more women than men found customer service features to be of high importance.

More than half of consumers surveyed expressed interest in virtual catalogs and circulars that can be downloaded directly to their desktops, so retailers could update information on new merchandise and special offers.

We'll Get Back To You. We Value Your Business. No, Really

Features like the ability to "co-shop" with another person virtually rate highly, as does the ability to get instant results from queries via self-service. In other words, if a shopper queries a bookstore's Web site to find if a certain book is in stock, an e-mail auto-reply stating that "someone will get back to you in three to five business days, thank you for your query, we value your business" is, today, the equivalent of telling the customer, "Natter off, please. We're far too busy to worry about your stupid question." That Web site had better allow the customer to check the real-time stock status of a book…on the spot. To take it a step further, a "2.0" Web surfer will expect to be able to view the cover of the book. Read reviews. Listen to snippets of the audio book. Read part of the first chapter. Buy the e-book on the spot. See the ratings of other customers and share the ratings with friends. View other books written by the author. Click on a video of a recent interview with the author. Browse the author's blog. Download a coupon to use for purchase of the book. Visit and post to a discussion board about the book.

The Financial Implications

Since consumers this year reported that they purchased more holiday gifts online this year than they have in the past, and based on their online shopping experience this year, more than three-quarters plan to shop online more during the 2008 holiday season, the health of retailers' e-commerce experiences is doubly critical. Rising expectations plus rising online sales means that retailers must grow their online shopping experiences exponentially — a 10 percent improvement in usability is an acknowledgement of defeat.

So are you up to the job of making sure your younger, and increasingly powerful, online shoppers are satisfied with your service? If you're not, and if you've just discovered that the youngest person in your marketing department is 37, I suggest you consider forming a few focus groups with teenagers and 20-something shoppers. And don't skimp on the healthful snacks: your most profitable customers may still be growing. **CIS**

Honoring the 'Best of the Best' in Contact Center Innovation

Calling all trendsetters.

- Launched a new product that broke the mold?
- Elevated an existing product or service to the next level?

Customer Interaction Solutions Presents:

The 9th Annual TMC Labs Innovation Awards

Honoring

Products that demonstrate raw innovation, unique features, and significant contributions toward improving communications technology.

While innovation is frequently a question of firsts, often it is taking an existing idea and improving upon it or looking at it from a slightly different perspective. Challenging established standards, and then introducing different approaches to achieve distinctive results certainly helps to define innovation within this industry.

Granted not only to the best-selling products, but instead to those demonstrating raw innovation, uniqueness, and representing a significant contribution to the industry.

Innovative Times Call for Innovative Marketing

With advancing technologies furthering development in the contact center industry, new companies entering the market and new and improved products and services are being created all the time. With call center technologies growing by leaps and bounds, new companies, new products, and new services are being created all the time. The best way to stand out is by having the distinction of being a TMC Labs Innovation Award winner. With the market growing so quickly, there's never been a greater need to associate this prestigious award to your product.

The TMC Labs Innovation Awards winners will be published in the September and October 2008 issues of *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine.

Nominate Your Product or Service

Become a member of the elite group of TMC Labs Innovation Award winners. Apply Today!
Early bird deadline: June 19, 2008
Final deadline: July 1, 2008

For more information and to apply, please visit:

http://www.tmcnet.com/1681.1

by Stefania Viscusi,
Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

Listening To A Vision Of Speech In The Future: A Moment With Loquendo's New CEO

Loquendo, a Telecom Italia (News - Alert) company headquartered in Turin, Italy, offers speech technologies as well as products for servers, desktops, PDAs and embedded environments. Their speech solutions are offered for integrators in 23 languages with 54 voices. In January, Davide Franco (News - Alert) assumed the position of CEO at Loquendo. He is also Chairman of the Board for the company.

I recently had a chance to catch up with Davide to see how his transition to CEO and chairman was progressing, and what changes we might see in the company in the future.

SV: Congratulations on your appointment. At the end of the first month in your new role, can you give us a few of your first impressions?

DF: Being part of Telecom Italia, I was already well aware of Loquendo before coming on board. In fact, I have known of the high quality and diversity of Loquendo's technology from well before I joined Telecom: I gained valuable experience in the ICT sector and, before my time with Telecom, I worked with CRM and ERP systems, where accessibility across multiple channels and the quality of automated interactions with clients (external or internal) are of primary importance.

As head of Service Development Marketing for Broadband Multimedia Services at Telecom Italia, I then had the chance to evaluate Loquendo's technologies in the field, where they had already been integrated into intelligent network services.

I confirmed what I had already suspected: that behind the excellence of Loquendo's speech technologies there is a staggering breadth of knowledge and expertise. At Loquendo, I have found a rich mix of knowledge and professionalism that makes me even more proud to have become part of the team. After all, a market-leading company must invest continually in R&D and product quality, and this is only made possible if one can count on the invaluable resource of a highly skilled workforce.

> **I believe that a company's reputation depends not only on its product portfolio, but also on the scientific excellence and public profile of its R&D team.**

SV: You are clearly impressed with the high level of professionalism you have encountered in the company, but I wonder what challenges you think there may be for the workforce?

DF: I would hope that my colleagues can achieve as high a profile as possible among the scientific community. I believe that a company's reputation depends not only on its product portfolio, but also on the scientific excellence and public profile of its R&D team. There is clearly still considerable room for improvement in the speech technology sector, and without a doubt, there is still much work to do.

Moreover, while maintaining the same level of excellence, our marketing and sales teams have to be aligned with the new market trends, must fully understand customers' needs, and need to be continually working on improving the effectiveness of our partner network.

SV: What opportunities do you foresee in terms of collaborations with the research sector?

DF: I would say it is important to counter-balance the natural tendency, present in all organizations, to be overly inward looking. It is essential that a company be aware of developments in the research sector as well as trends in the market, and that it is prepared to follow new lines of research. It is also vital that a company share its knowledge and the results of its research with the scientific community at large. A high level of openness is to the benefit of all. Loquendo, founded as a spinoff from the research arm of Telecom

Italia, has a long tradition of conducting research in collaboration with universities, both as a bilateral cooperation and within the framework of European-funded R&D projects.

We can also help universities to better focus their research topics in the field of speech technology, so the innovations they generate can more directly help in solving the problems the industry is struggling with.

SV: The role you have been entrusted with is a challenging one. The speech technology market is undergoing continual and rapid change, with continuous mergers and acquisitions creating dominant players. Have you thus far managed to formulate a strategy for the short, medium or long term?

DF: First, we need to maintain continuity with the previous leadership which allowed Loquendo to position itself as a leading player in the international market. Our first priority, therefore, is to maintain and strengthen Loquendo's product excellence and renowned product innovation, to confirm our commitment in being standards compliant, and to continuously broaden our language portfolio. Our aim is to strengthen Loquendo's positioning as a Global Player, able to support the major vendors in all markets, from server to desktop and embedded.

Product strategy must be coupled with a corresponding market strategy, by reinforcing existing partnerships and establishing new ones, by targeting vertical markets with a strengthening of Loquendo's solutions, and by being the first to penetrate new markets as they emerge: all this by leveraging our core assets such as the company's huge technological expertise and experience, and our innovative and fast-moving company culture.

Competition is growing fiercer, and there is a risk of commoditization as voice technologies become more pervasive. Our customers, however, are recognizing the difference, and the value we are creating for them, and are already spreading the word that "Loquendo does it better."

> **Competition is growing fiercer, and there is a risk of commoditization as voice technologies become more pervasive.**

Our efforts have been rewarded not only by our economic performance, but also by analysts such as Frost and Sullivan, who have just nominated Loquendo as "2008 Emerging Company of the Year."

SV: Is there some particular theme that you hold especially close to your heart at this time?

DF: Something I think is of fundamental importance is the market's perception of what can be done with speech technology, which at the current time is still surprisingly limited.

Coming from the world of application-oriented solutions, I personally believe it is important that Loquendo is not only perceived as the leading supplier of text-to-speech technology, but also for the excellence of its full range of speech technologies — from automatic speech recognition systems to VoiceXML platforms, voice biometric technologies, embedded speech solutions — and all these technologies add value to our clients' solutions.

Bearing in mind that technology will never be able to substitute all the manifold and extraordinary human talents and capabilities, our products, integrated with content, data and network, serve to greatly improve the human-to-machine experience in all our daily tasks and to help differently abled people to communicate more effectively with the world.

SV: Looking back at 2007, can you highlight some of the most important advancements or trends that emerged in the speech technology market?

DF: 2007 saw a significant shift from traditional telephony to IP, with responses from all network and software players. We believe that in the near future we will see several new proposals for this market and Loquendo will be part of the game.

The contact center's traditional mode of interaction has seen a radical transformation towards automated solutions, based on menus and DTMF. This has seen a move away from menu-based interaction towards a more flexible approach through natural language speech and tools that allow huge improvements in efficiency. New up-and-coming scenarios include video as well as audio interaction that benefit from Loquendo speech technologies. Within this scenario, the MRCP standard has consolidated its position during the last year, and we are witnessing massive adoption by the major players, which is rewarding our investments in this field.

Moving from telephony to embedded, 2007 saw a rapid expansion in the use of speech technology in the automotive and navigation sector. People are by now used to hearing TTS technology in their cars, and to using speech to voice-control onboard devices such as sat-navs and media players. Consequently, speech technology has now achieved a far higher profile, and end users are finally beginning to see its true potential.

Loquendo's decision several years ago to miniaturize its technologies, passing from server to embedded, is now reaping the rewards.

We have seen technology on mobile devices in transition from more traditional applications such as voice dialling towards message dictation and voice search, yet nevertheless these remain emerging technologies for the mobile sector. Loquendo is currently developing several solutions in this area.

The voice biometrics sector, on the other hand, has evolved considerably, not just in speaker verification, but particularly in speaker identification. The identification of voice characteristics is useful for many applications, both in commercial applications to enable more secure transactions, and in the intelligence sector to support classified operations.

SV: You had a number of new releases and announcements last year. What can we expect from Loquendo over the next few years?

DF: The speech market is undergoing diversification at a rapid rate and new sectors and applications are continually opening up to the use of speech. The technology must adapt to cater for this, and one way in which Loquendo is meeting this demand is in the development of advanced features for all products in the Loquendo portfolio.

Last year, Loquendo developed and released new versions over the complete range of its products. 2007 also saw a marked increase in take-up of Loquendo speech technologies by high-profile companies worldwide and in every business sector, from voice portals and IVRs to avatars and telematics.

In the meantime, Loquendo has continued its active involvement with the major bodies for the support and development of standards, many of which are, in fact, authored by Loquendo.

In August, at the 2007 Speech Industry Awards, Loquendo was also awarded "Market Leader – Best Speech Engine" in recognition of the company's dedicated and long-standing commitment to innovation, as well as in recognition of the excellence of Loquendo TTS and ASR engines.

We are proud of Loquendo's achievements during 2007, and will continue to work in powering our capacity to meet the demands of our customers with high quality products and services.

We were very pleased to receive the 2008 Frost & Sullivan Emerging Company of the Year Award in Telematics and Infotainment, given to Loquendo for its excellence in "new market penetration, strategy innovation, technological innovation and leadership, revenue and market share growth."

SV: Do you have any predictions for where the market is headed in 2008 and after?

DF: 2008 has been hailed by some as the year of the natural interface – i.e., interaction by voice, sight, touch (e.g., iPhone (News - Alert)), etc. While take-up of speech technology in most sectors has been slower than widely predicted, take-up in the navigation market has been relatively rapid, blazing the trail for other sectors to follow suit. With users now accustomed to using voice control in their cars, spill over into other areas is expected to follow over the next year. Likely sectors are home automation and robotics, improved accessibility to technology for the differently abled and a generally more enjoyable human-to-machine experience.

On the telephony application side, the role of VoIP will also certainly increase in the mobile world, to allow video as well as voice interactions. On the application side, unified communications seem to be a very promising sector together with customer care and self-service applications.

Another developing trend is the creation of more lively conversational interfaces where the user will be less constrained compared with currently available applications. Over the next year, for example, we are likely to see the increased presence and sophistication of virtual assistants — avatars whose facial expressions are synchronized with synthetic speech — examples of which can be seen on the Web sites of numerous leading companies. The technology is now also accessible on mobile devices, and users have demonstrated they are very comfortable interacting with this method of providing online customer care. The cost savings compared to traditional customer care, and the improved experience compared to IVRs, are considerable.

Finally, I would also expect to see further expansion of the role of standards in all kinds of platforms, and we are currently hoping for the very first release of the next generation of voice browsing, where both extended media (video) and multimodality will be included.

SV: Thank you, Davide, for taking time to talk to us. **CIS**

September 16-18, 2008
L.A. Convention Center,
Los Angeles, California
www.itexpo.com

TMC INTERNET TELEPHONY Conference & EXPO

The Ultimate
IP Communications Experience!

- Discover New Solutions
- Establish New Relationships
- Learn How to Select and Deploy
- Meet Hundreds of Potential Partners and Suppliers in One Place, at One Time

For More Information, Contact
Dave Rodriguez at
(203) 852-6800, ext. 146 or
drodriguez@tmcnet.com.

Diamond Sponsor:
aculab

Sponsored By:

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE®

The Multimedia Contact Center Solutions Experts

[Contact Center Research]

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

Contact Center Research - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Technology Marketing Corporation
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address http://callcenterinfo.tmcnet.com/
Go Links
Google Search 26 blocked Check AutoLink Options
TMCnet On the Web
Communications
Contact Center Research
Blogs:
Rich Tehrani
Tom Keating
Greg Galitzine
SIPThat
Al Bredenberg
Call Center/CRM
...more
CHANNELS
SERVICE PROVIDER
ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPER
RESELLER
GOVERNMENT
CONSUMER
About TMC
TMCnet Services
Advertise
Blogs
News Alerts XML
Free eNews
Events
Publications
Whitepapers
Content Submission
Subscribe Today!
SIP
Channels Home
VoIP
Home
VoIP
CRM
Call Center
Information Technology
IP Communications
VoIP for SMB
Contact Center Research
What's New
Events
Publications
Forums
Contributors
Type your search here
Go!
VoIP Forums
General, FAQs, How to
Termination, Origination, Want Ads, Barter
Asterisk Forum : User Community
Sipura Technology Forum : User Community
Skype Forum
Triple Play Forum
Call Center Forums
General, FAQs, How to
Wanted Ads/Classifieds
WiMAX Forum
Products & Solu
Support & Services
About Interactive Intelligence
Interactive Intelligence
Contact Center Research
Contact Center Analysis
See All Analysis
Contact Center White Papers
http://voip-forum.tmcnet.com/voip-forum/forum/
Internet

[new rules for IP business communication]

[old rule] "IP-enabled" is close enough.

[new rule] Buy an IP system, not a label.

Interactive Intelligence Inc® | Deliberately Innovative

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

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

Technology Still Matters in the Contact Center
April 26,2006

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

IVR and the Great Disconnect
April 20,2006

SAP Enters On-demand CRM Market
April 19,2006

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

[new rules for IP business communication]

Register for a Free half day Seminar

Keynote presented by Rich Tehrani, President of TMC®

Visit www.inin.com for a list of upcoming dates and cities near you

[new rules for IP business communication]

[old rule] Efficient call routing is good enough.

[new rule] Agent effectiveness will boost your bottom line.

Powered By: TMCnet™

by David Sims,
Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

The Growth Report For Contact Center Applications

Good news for the contact center market: North American contact center applications markets are poised for "significant growth" in the next few years, and growth rates are "expected to peak between 2008 and 2010," according to Frost & Sullivan (www.frost.com) research analyst Kunal Kakodkar in a recent report.

"Growth in contact center applications will primarily be driven by two factors: an increasing trend amongst customers to move to IP-based technology and the replacement sales of systems sold around Y2K," the report notes.

Not surprisingly, the tier-one contact center products vendors lead the aggregated market share. Frost & Sullivan found that Avaya's "dominant presence" in the ICR market carries forward to the overall numbers and combined with the company's play in outbound dialing and IVR markets; its revenues exceed the total of its next four closest competitors.

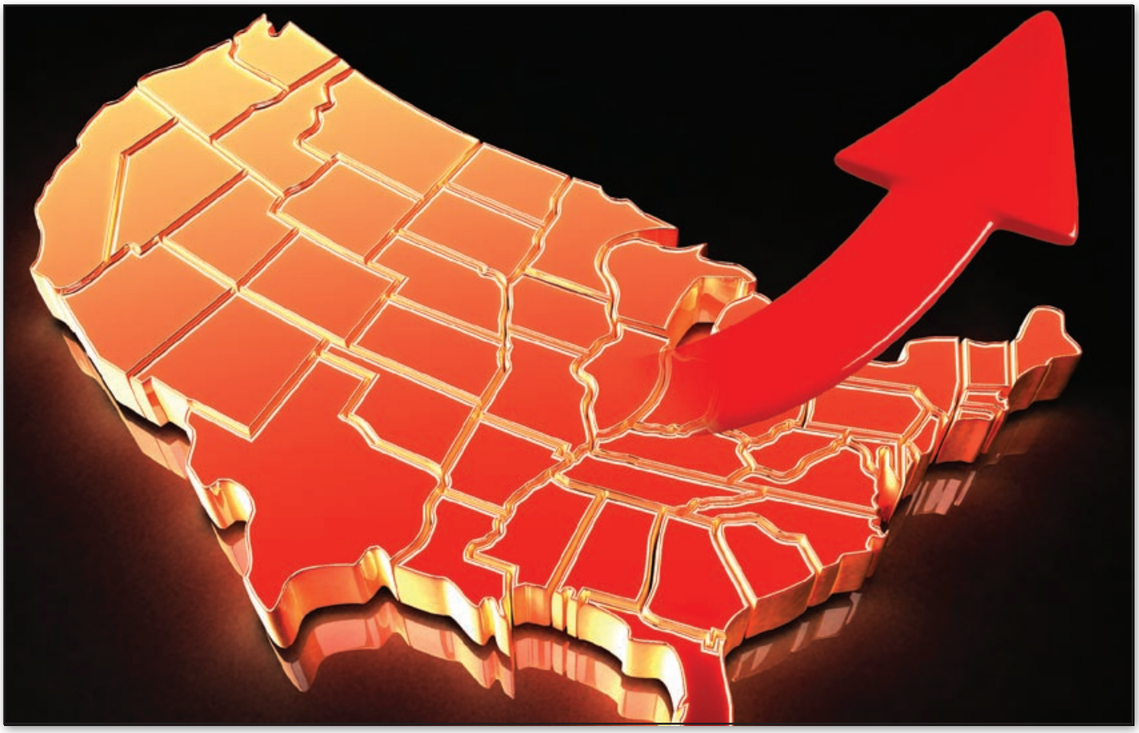
At the same time, "significant merger activity has resulted in relatively niche participants grabbing significant shares of the market," the report says. NICE Systems' (News - Alert) mid-2006 acquisition of IEX Corp. gave the company a healthy 4.2 percent overall share — all of it in the agent performance optimization space.

Oracle's acquisitions of Siebel Systems (News - Alert) and PeopleSoft strengthened its grip on the North American customer relationship management (CRM) market, giving it a lion's share of the multimedia systems (MM) market.

The report cautions, though, that as the large enterprise segment begins to saturate, there may be a notable stagnation in growth. "Taking this into consideration, vendors should adapt their marketing strategy to target the small to mid-sized business," a layer of the market that is proving to be lucrative for most contact center solutions providers.

There will be "tremendous potential for growth in the small to mid-enterprise sector," says Kakodkar. "The industry may experience a slowdown till the still-nascent SMB [small to medium-sized businesses] strategies of the large enterprise vendors come to fruition."

The report recommended that large enterprise vendors remain agile and able to move from targeting the larger deployments to identifying and catering to the needs of the small to medium-sized customers to avoid the inevitable stagnation that will occur when the large enterprise market is saturated. **CIS**



SAVE THE DATE

TMC UNIVERSITY™

Get Certified in
the Latest Contact
Center Technology
(Scholarships Available)

TMC Call Center 2.0™

September 16-18, 2008
Los Angeles Convention Center
Los Angeles, CA

Gold Sponsor
CosmoCom™

Co-Located with
TMC INTERNET TELEPHONY Conference & EXPO

www.callcenter20.com

For More Information, Contact Dave Rodriguez at (203) 852-6800, ext. 146 or drodriguez@tmcnet.com.

by Patrick Barnard,
Contributing Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

A Shake Up Of The Enterprise Market

TouchStar (News - Alert) is once again about to shake up the call center industry with the introduction of "TouchStar Enterprise 2008," its all-new, full-featured enterprise solution for outbound, inbound and blended communications. The new platform, which represents the company's entry into the Tier 1 enterprise market, was crafted to offer reliability and scalability up to 7,200 agents in the first version.

With its unified communications and virtualization capabilities, this multichannel platform is ideal for enterprises with multiple, geographically dispersed locations, which require a system that can seamlessly deliver communications across every division and every department, no matter where it is located. The solution, which handles both VoIP and TDM environments, includes TouchStar's predictive dialer — offering predictive, power, preview and manual dialing options — as well as multiple ACD and IVR features, compliance management, custom integration, quality assurance, reporting, recording, scripting and best time to call analytics. In addition, it offers six primary modules facilitating complete Web-based management of the entire system, including Administrator, Supervisor, Agent, IVR Maker, Reporter and Predictive Dialer modules. The full .NET (News - Alert) solution also offers new redundancy and compliance features which are in demand in today's highly regulated enterprise market.

In a recent interview, TouchStar CEO Steve Bederman (News - Alert) explained that the development of this new enterprise offering came about as the result of a Herculean effort on the part of the company's development team, which accelerated development when he realized how close they were and side projects were simply delaying final release.

"Two months ago, we had a situation where we were being evaluated by an enterprise prospect, and they were very excited to get to work with us," Bederman said. "They had heard about us, and they love our client focus but at the end of the day, they found it hard to make the choice with us, because although we could accomplish an enterprise deployment, it would have had to have been done on many servers, which could possibly add points of failure. Telecommunications systems do required hardware, and we have a lot of happy clients with hundreds and hundreds of agents on many servers, but this client said, 'You know, for an enterprise-type of solution, we would want something with more … finesse.'"

Bederman said at the time this potential enterprise client came to the company, TouchStar's 60-plus developers, who are spread out across the globe in the company's R&D facilities in Denver, New York, Davenport, Phoenix, the Philippines and India, were working on a wide variety of projects, including custom development of the company's many products and rewriting the code for all its products into .NET for higher scalability and host-ability. One group of developers had already rewritten the base code for the TouchStar call center platform and they were finishing up several significant new integrated modules. So, being very close, company management decided to invest additional resources and bonuses to complete the enterprise product in an accelerated time frame.

"As you know, the pace of development is not always market driven, developers would frankly prefer to have it driven at their convenience," Bederman said. "So, I said, 'Since we know what we're doing and we have the path, and it's simply a matter of focusing resources on it, let's finish this.' So what we did was we delayed development on almost all of the other initiatives we were working on — except for some of the custom development that we had committed to — and we dedicated all of our developers from Denver, New York, Phoenix, Davenport, the Philippines and India and we came up with a two-month development finalization plan and a three-month beta testing plan. Well, we completed the development plan ahead of time — and today we can offer the ability to have thousands of agents on one server."

Bederman said the platform is currently in beta testing with two large call centers. He said the developers worked through some initial alpha testing issues and beta testing was completed in February. TouchStar 2008 Enterprise became available in March through direct sales and international channel partners.

Bederman added that this accomplishment means TouchStar has now successfully "bridged the gap" between the middle market and the enterprise market. "There are certainly a lot of small and medium-sized call centers in the world," he said (and here it should be noted that TouchStar offers a wide range of solutions tailored for the SMB market), "But there is another level — and that's the medium to enterprise. Right now, it seems as if the companies we compete with have segmented themselves to serve either the small, small to medium, or medium to enterprise — and it's not that companies don't step into each other's territories — but they're kind of 'kludge-y' solutions and they're not always [attracting] their ideal customer."

Bederman pointed out that not only did the company have to get the lead out on the development side in order to get its new enterprise edition launched in time, it also had to undertake a huge effort to beef up the support and services side as well.

"The thing to remember is that when you come out with an enterprise product … it requires developing, in parallel with that — your support services, your documentation and your training for your employees — so that on day one, the customer doesn't have to pay a price for taking on a new product," he said. "The customer depends on us as a mature company … to deliver products that are tested and mature."

(Bederman proclaims on the TouchStar Web site: "A client gives us a gift of trust. We return that gift by serving them with passion, integrity, relentless effort and sound processes.")

Bederman added that TouchStar now has more than 2,500 clients – some of which are in the medium-to-large segment – and its product line has been re-vamped and expanded significantly in recent years as it has gone from serving smaller-sized companies to medium-sized companies to now serving large companies.

TouchStar has achieved amazingly brisk growth during the past three years through the strategic acquisition of direct competitors. In late 2005, it acquired New York City-based Digisoft Computers, Inc., which offered software- based contact center solutions and the leading scripting tool available on the market. Then in December 2006, the company acquired Davenport, Iowa-based Sigmaworx Inc. (formerly ETS), one of the original predictive dialing solutions which had over 2,000 legacy customers. This was a move that significantly increased TouchStar's market share. And most recently, in November 2007, the company acquired Phoenix-based Data-Tel Info Solutions (News - Alert, a provider of hosted, turn-key call center solutions primarily geared for the telemarketing industry.

In all cases, TouchStar has maintained the full product lines of the companies it has acquired. That means it has expanded its suite of offerings with each acquisition and has further broadened its market reach. Rather than taking the approach of integrating all of the products into one, "be all, end all" solution geared for every sized company in every vertical imaginable, TouchStar has taken the more sensible approach of offering a diverse fleet of solutions tailored for specific industries.

Privately held TouchStar reports that it is well-backed for its future growth through additional strategic acquisitions. The company is backed by a major equity financing firm and has also established lines of credit with several major U.S. banks. It just recently announced that it has secured additional financing from SVB Silicon Valley Bank, a commercial bank that lends to technology and life science companies.

TouchStar Global Director of Marketing Brian Smits said it has been "very stimulating to be a part of driving TouchStar's rapid growth — we started out serving the smaller call centers and then moved up into mid-market — and from mid-market we've moved up into the enterprise market — and every time we've moved up, it's been a natural progression, and we've changed the market."

> **"As you know, the pace of development is not always market driven, developers would frankly prefer to have it driven at their convenience."**

"I think what is exciting for us right now is that, we know we're going to have a big impact on the enterprise market — we will change that market," added Smits.

Smits said that in order to move into the Tier 1 enterprise market, TouchStar had to significantly beef up its project management staff in order to "put together a dedicated group to focus on new enterprise products." This includes a staff expansion that started by adding eight new technologists who work for the company's new EDGE Enterprise Services division, which offers a comprehensive group of services for enterprise clients, including business analysis, technical analysis, scope of services, pre-implementation planning, proposals, pre-implementation training, project management, implementation, training, optimization, support, managed services and more. The division, which is headed up by senior management, handles everything from "the business discovery, the technical discovery, pre training, project management, all the way through to implementation, optimization and support." Smits said in the past year alone, TouchStar has added over $3.4 million of labor investments to keep up with growth and plan for future growth.

Smits said TouchStar 2008 Enterprise is available as both an on-premise and a hosted solution; however, they are anticipating that most enterprise customers will deploy it on site. He points out that any of TouchStar's solutions could now be hosted in a multi-tenant co-location facility.

TouchStar also recently introduced a new standalone Unified Communications product called TouchStar Unify.

"As we were wrapping up the enterprise product, we completed another product called TouchStar Unify, which is really a revolutionary unified communications solution," said Smits. "TouchStar Unify can unify all your existing communications systems – so from one application you can unify multiple telecommunications systems, call center systems, your PBX, Skype, Asterisk (News - Alert) as well as other communications tools such as your e-mail, Web chat and SMS text messaging. It's basically contact management with click-to-call, click-to-e-mail, click-to-chat and click-to-text, and what it does is automatically log any activity, whether it is from the PBX (News - Alert) or e-mail or your call center system. It automatically logs that activity and unifies it into a single database – we happen to use SQL as the database for it – and it is a browser-based system."

So, for example, a Fortune 500 company with 50 different locations and 50 different PBXs can, by hosting Unify on a separate server, unify all of its communications, thus streamlining communications, boosting employee productivity and saving a bundle on communications costs.

"Think about the power of having multiple telephony interfaces," Smits said, adding that the product has been in development and testing for more than 14 months. "You might have someone in India using Skype, you might have someone using Asterisk, you might have someone using a Nortel (News - Alert) PBX, you might have someone using TouchStar Call Center – this product will unify all of those communications pieces."

For call centers, Unify is particularly attractive because the contact management functionality allows for contact database segmentation for multiple clients and multiple page layouts and fields for different clients. For example, a market research firm will need a different contact layout than a customer service call center. Unify provides a simple GUI for customization. Smits is very enthusiastic about this new product and the value it will provide to call centers and businesses. He added, "Unify is another product that expands TouchStar's potential market."

Bederman and Smits added that the company is gearing up to announce a new acquisition in the coming months. It also has several new product releases planned for the second quarter of 2008.

Headquartered in Denver, TouchStar is one of largest and fastest-growing call center technology companies in the U.S. The company — Microsoft Gold Independent Software Development partner — offers a broad suite of solutions, including a choice of five different hosted and on-premise call center systems, predictive dialers, voice messaging systems, an IP-PBX phone system, and its new Unify solution. TouchStar's portfolio includes solutions tailored for almost every industry, and any size company.

For more information about TouchStar, visit www.touchstar.com. **CIS**

broadvox™
BUSINESS CONNECTS HERE

From The IP Communications Experts

By Eric Eckman,
Director Business Development,
Broadvox

IP Communications For The Contact Or Call Center

Call centers are traditionally staffed with a labor force that requires training and performance monitoring. They often use interactive voice response, automatic call distributors and legacy PBXs. As business grows and call volume increases, these legacy call centers are changing with the times, evolving into IP contact centers to satisfy the need for rapid and efficient responses to a broader range of customer contact methods. IP contact centers that leverage voice over IP (VoIP) technologies can manage and integrate all manner of customer contact methods, whether via phone call, fax, e-mail, instant message or other data transmission. Today's IP contact centers integrate functions that provide workforce management, improved training, performance management and interaction optimization applications to yield tremendous potential savings for businesses that deploy or lease contact services.

IP contact or call centers are ideal applications for SIP trunking. The hardware, maintenance and IT personnel costs associated with VoIP gateways used by contact centers is expensive, but SIP trunking eliminates these costs. The need for VoIP gateways is diminishing as gear is shipped SIP-capable from manufacturers. SIP trunking, paired with the diminishing need for VoIP gateways, makes the cost benefits of IP contact centers even more dramatic.

Dramatic cost savings, however, is not the only benefit of adding SIP trunking. Imagine a call center that suddenly has the opportunity to bring on a large new client that will require the ordering of a block of phone lines, but there is no guarantee that the client will sign the contract. Can the telecom or IT director be convinced to approve that kind of expenditure with no guaranteed ROI? With Broadvox GO! SIP Trunking, the number of phone lines is not an issue. Our offering will allow for as many simultaneous calls as the contact center broadband can support, or virtually unlimited concurrent call sessions, and it takes minutes to configure. There is never a charge for unused SIP trunking capacity.

Establishing communication with the right resource requires redirecting or using pre-contact routing. Redirecting is accomplished through tie lines or "take back and transfer" capabilities, both of which incur significant expense when dealing with a high volume of contacts and distributed remote sites. With SIP trunking, SIP contacts come directly from a telecom service provider and are load balanced across all sites or put into a voice portal or other contact classification system so they can be referred to the appropriate resource, a contact center or an agent. The communication can be directed or redirected any number of times without incurring "take back and transfer" costs.

Why not focus on deploying the preferred best-of-breed applications that leverage IP and SIP instead of locking into high cost, inflexible proprietary technologies? Contact center products selected for need and function should offer the assurance they will work together seamlessly. SIP interoperability makes this possible. Service providers accept and comply with the SIP standard, making it easier to expand business operations to geographic locations and efficiently route communications through multiple contact centers, thus dynamically balancing the call load while providing business continuity in the event of a disaster or major outage. SIP offers developers an open protocol standard so they can use a wide range of products that share common interfaces, easing implementation.

Call load balancing prevents traffic on one line from becoming so heavy that bottlenecks develop. Contact volume fluctuates depending on the contact method, type of business, locations and seasonal factors. A retail business with contact centers on both coasts experiences various peak loads from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm depending on the location. Call volume also increases seasonally, such as calls to travel agents during holidays, customer orders for Christmas and, the biggest of all, the hotline for cooking turkeys on Thanksgiving. Either way, the call traffic must be distributed and rerouted if necessary so the calls reach their destination and are quickly serviced.

Adding traditional TDM PBX equipment is expensive and disruptive. Growth and change should be positive indicators for business, but interruptions from equipment additions negatively impact companies. Implementing an IP contact center with SIP technology can take place in stages and at a lower cost while business continues uninterrupted because most new devices are SIP-capable.

GO!Domestic is the Broadvox SIP Trunking product developed for contact or call centers. It will work with either an IP or TDM contact center. GO!Domestic provides all of the aforementioned capabilities and much more. Contact Broadvox at 866-770-9960 or visit us at www.broadvox.com.

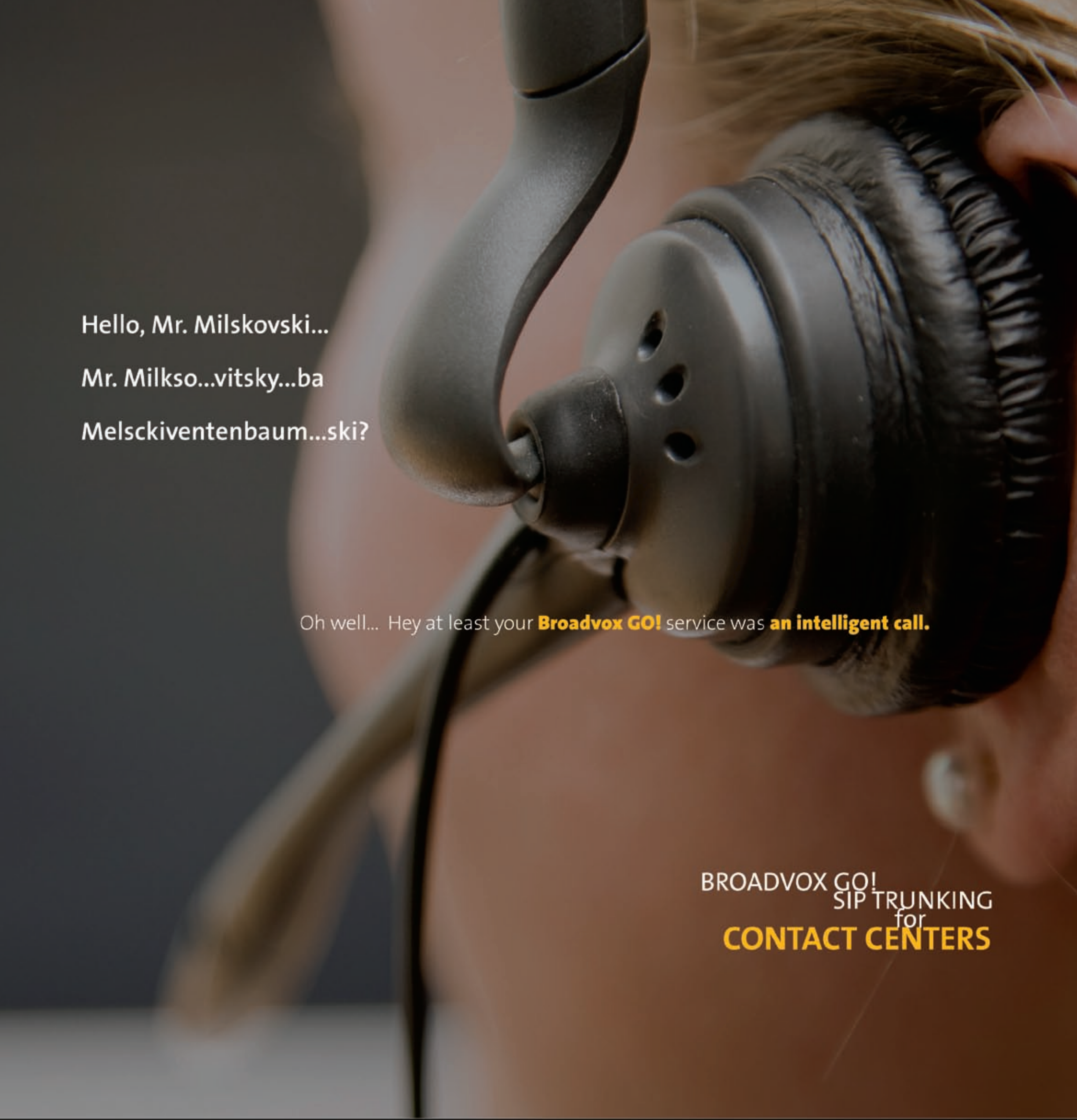
Handling Spikes In Call Volume

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

If the behavior of consumers could be predicted, business would be strictly a science. It's not. It's an art of sorts. Business is cyclical. Some cycles can be predicted: the holiday shopping season, the summer season, a big promotion. Even an event like a recall usually allows a company a day to prepare extra resources.

But the expensive spikes in customer contacts are the ones you don't see coming: an outage. A natural disaster. A political event. A misprint on a brochure. A competitor's actions. Whether companies are equipped to handle events like these what can make or break a business. You may have the best trained call center agents in the business, but if they and your customers are not properly connecting, or your customers are waiting a half an hour to speak with your wonderful agents, your efforts have been wasted.

Many call center-heavy companies would like to take advantage of the benefits of IP contact centers, but are unwilling to risk much in the way of resources, or are headed by a conservative management layer that will approve no technology changes without very fast ROI. The message that today's SIP-enabled IP contact center solution companies can give is that given the risk-free nature of these technologies, and understanding the kinds of events they are capable of preventing, call centers that wish to retain control of their customer contact volume cannot afford NOT to go all-IP.


Hello, Mr. Milskovski...
Mr. Milkso...vitsky...ba
Melsckiventenbaum...ski?
Oh well... Hey at least your Broadvox GO! service was an intelligent call.
BROADVOX GO! SIP TRUNKING for CONTACT CENTERS

- Unified Communications on a reliable, robust IP network
- Nationwide and international LD from 1¢/min
- Discounted Toll-free, DID blocks and unlimited local calling
- Concurrent call sessions limited only by available bandwidth
- Business continuity and disaster recovery
- Key systems, PBXs and IP PBXs supported
- Virtual connection allows agents to work from anywhere
- Dynamic and seasonal load balancing (center or geography - based)

broadvox™
BUSINESS CONNECTS HERE

866.791.1621
Learn more at www.broadvox.com/contactcenter.aspx

Broadvox is a registered trademark of Broadvox LLC. Broadvox GO! SIP Trunking is a service provided by Broadvox GO! LLC.

Xceed
Xchange Business Complexities for....
Peace of Mind

From The BPO Experts

Egypt: A Rising Star Of An Outsourcing Destination

“Egypt is a rising star of contact center offshore destinations. Comparative analysis has shown 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.” (Frost and Sullivan 2007, Whitepaper)

Many experts have analyzed Egypt in the past few years, and they have stated that, according to economic indicators, Egypt’s GDP has been growing over the past five years and its inflation has been kept at stable levels. Egypt’s telecommunications infrastructure is very well developed, and the international long-distance rates have been lowered in an effort to promote the contact center industry.

Egypt is rapidly emerging as a world-class hotspot for the outsourcing and offshoring sectors, and is proving attractive to international investors. With stiff regional and international competition, this burgeoning country on the cusp of Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia is gaining steam.

“Offshore outsourcing has become one of the keys to lowering operating costs, increasing the focus on core competencies and improving customer relationship management. While it provides companies with substantial benefits, there are a number of pitfalls. These can be avoided by diligent location and provider selection process.” (Frost and Sullivan 2007, Whitepaper)

Since the inception of its “technocratic” government in 2004, Egypt has been ranked as the number one global economic reformer in two out of three years as an investor-friendly environment by the World Bank. The new government has set about making changes to attract more foreign direct investment into the country that boasts a favorable cost structure, skilled labor force and an enviable location.

There is much speculation about which region could be the next “In” destination for outsourcing. Many candidates are on the starter blocks: The Philippines, South America, China, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. Each destination boasts a wide spectrum of offers and a variety of advantages: cost, proximity, scalability, quality, language diversity and accessibility. Will any of these regions loosen India’s grip on the global outsourcing market? With a sustained 55 to 65 percent CAGR over the past few years, Egypt is one of the fastest-growing countries that should be evaluated in comparison to other destinations, as part of a larger region: North Africa.

Regional companies in North Africa are in a unique position and have great potential to be among the top global players.

Xceed is a fast-growing global provider of high quality business process outsourcing services, offering integrated customer care and associated back-office processing for commercial and governmental clients worldwide.

As one of the largest contact centers in the Southern Mediterranean region, Xceed was established in 2002, originally as an IT arm of the local telecom provider, Telecom Egypt. It has since developed into something much larger, providing services to major multinational leaders in technical support, customer relationship management, market research, customer retention programs and IT consulting.

Xceed Chairman and CEO Dr. Adel Danish is a firm believer in Egypt’s capabilities as an offshoring destination – and why not? He has watched his own company grow from 250 employees to more than 2,000 in a span of five years, experiencing 50 percent growth per year for the past four years and showing no signs of letting up.

“When you look at human resources, the pool of talent in Egypt, you will find 250,000 to 270,000 university graduates available on the market every year,” said Dr. Danish, citing the labor force as a key contributor to growth and scalability. “The talent pool in Egypt, because of its location and ethnic mix, has a spectrum of languages that you will not find anywhere else. We service international call centers in English, Arabic, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese and Hebrew — this is one of the few places where you will find these languages available from locals.”

The third element, said Dr. Danish, are the incentives provided by the government of Egypt, which are very attractive. Finally, proximity plays a major role in attracting investments. The country is close to Europe, Asia and the Middle East, which allows it to provide call center services to countries around the clock, a favorable time-zone advantage.

For more information about Xceedcc.com.

Searching For Greener Call Center Fields

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

It’s not uncommon to see stories weekly, even daily, about outsourcing to certain spots: India and, to a lesser extent, the Philippines. While it might be premature to say that BPO in these countries has reached saturation point, it’s impossible to argue that costs have gone up, particularly in India. Labor costs, facilities costs and employee attrition have all been reported as rising. While India is still a giant and will continue to see a lot of outsourced business, many companies with call center needs are seeking greener fields.

One of the weak spots of India is its lack of European language support. Another is its location in terms of time zone limitations. These are two areas in which a country like Egypt has a natural advantage over other destinations.

According to Datamonitor, “In terms of its economy, Egypt is by far stronger and more stable than many of its counterparts in the region. It also has a highly educated workforce that speaks several languages.

Call center saturation can become a problem for a number of reasons. First, the “tier-one” providers, given their rapid growth, become more expensive. This encourages tier-two providers to set up shop to siphon off business. While few people are arguing with the quality provided by the tier-one companies, the tier-two quality becomes much less guaranteed. Agent accents are heavier. Training and monitoring are less rigorous. And as we all know, it doesn’t take many bad experiences with call center agents to send customers permanently on the run. When they do, any costs savings you have acheived have not only dissipated, they have taken a chunk of your profits with them.

If you are looking to outsource your call center, think about why you’re doing it. You want to keep costs low, of course, but you need to keep quality high. You may want to offer round-the-clock service. Examine whether you can reap all these benefits of offshore outsourcing, but in a greener pasture such as a country like Egypt. You will be pleasantly surprised.

TMC INTERNET TELEPHONY®
Conference & EXPO

September 16-18, 2008

L.A. Convention Center,
Los Angeles, California

www.itexpo.com

The Ultimate
IP Communications Experience!

- **Discover New Solutions**
- **Establish New Relationships**
- **Learn How to Select and Deploy**
- **Meet Hundreds of Potential Partners and Suppliers in One Place, at One Time**

Diamond Sponsor:

aculab

For More Information, Contact Dave Rodriguez at (203) 852-6800, ext. 146 or drodriguez@tmcnet.com.

VOLTDELTA
HOSTED SOLUTIONS

From The Directory Assistance Experts

By Brad Schorer,
Senior Vice President,
Marketing, VoltDelta

Contact Centers That Take Millions Of Calls Keep Them Short, Make Happy Callers - And Never Go Down

Telephone service providers make billions in revenue on directory assistance calls each year. They keys to profitability in this business are to answer every call placed to directory assistance, automate as many as possible, keep the average call times short and make sure that every caller gets the information he or she needs. Down time, delays, or outages are not acceptable.

For over 25 years, VoltDelta has been enabling directory assistance for over 100 telephone companies in North America and Europe by focusing on these core principals: sustaining high call volumes and availability, developing systems to minimize average agent work times and delivering high caller satisfaction.

Directory Assistance Experience Is Relevant To All Contact Centers

What VoltDelta does for the telecoms in providing directory assistance is common across the operational needs of all contact centers. These solutions rely on evolving technologies to continue to improve upon their business objectives.

Technology can be used to keep high caller satisfaction rates. Speech automation and voice-based self-service solutions allow callers to quickly get the information or perform the transaction they want when they want. Technologies such as private VoIP networks and speech automation keep costs down by providing less expensive but high quality transport and by reducing agent work time. Keeping the center up and running is absolutely a function of good technology design and architecture. Extensive call routing capabilities, redundant systems and scalability on-demand are all provided by new and improving technologies.

While technologies help attain these goals, there is always the cost constraint.

Using The Latest Technologies – Without The Capital Expense

Traditionally, implementing new technologies to expand the capabilities of the call center meant a significant upfront investment. Most well run companies require that any large capital expenditure show a compelling ROI case to even be considered. The advent of the hosted, on-demand model allows for all aspects of contact center technologies to be implemented without the major upfront cost but rather with an ongoing operational cost – typically cost per minute of use.

Technologies including speech automation, IVRs and ACDs, voice and data transport, reporting, outbound alerting and multimodal messaging and more can all be implemented using the hosted model. This provides almost any contact center with the ability to leverage the technologies that used to be available only to those who could afford significant capital expenditures. Additionally, hosted solutions include the upkeep, redundancy and maintenance of the technologies as part of the price; and implementation times are typically significantly less than premise deployments.

Contact centers of all types are taking advantage of the hosted model — even the large-scale telecom directory assistance centers — whether to complement existing premise-based systems or to provide completely new solutions, the hosted model is leveling the playing field.

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

On-Demand: The Key Driver Of Growth For Contact Centers

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

The word “revolutionary” gets used too often with products and technologies. (If you’ve ever watched a late-night infomercial, you’ll agree.) There have been a lot of technologies that have done great things for the call center/customer service industry. There are lots of solutions we couldn’t imagine living without today. However, few have merited the label “revolutionary” as it applies to changing the industry utterly.

On-demand delivery of contact center solutions is probably the only event to merit such a claim. In the earliest days of the discussion of application service providers, or ASPs, we thought this concept would be a bit of cream on top of the call center’s cake: a quirky model with some benefits for some applications and some call centers. Fast-forward about 10 years, and the on-demand model is delivering benefits to call centers that we couldn’t imagine just a decade ago. It’s turned the entire concept of “call center” on its ear: it has even changed the definition of what a “call center” is.

The ability to pay for services as you go, and to offer services, like directory assistance, not dreamed possible with last decade’s technology has raised the profile and importance of the call center in any organization exponentially. Thanks to the on-demand delivery model, the contact center is no longer a sink-hole of operating expenses, but a dynamic tool for business growth.

Industrywide, the result of the demand for hosted call center solutions is expected to be a shot of adrenaline for the call center market. Analyst group Datamonitor has predicted that the contact center technology market will grow 30 percent a year, reaching $4.7 billion by 2009. The increasing demand for on-demand solutions has been identified as a key driver of this growth, as it will allow organizations to offer services they never imagined possible just a few years ago, giving consumers more choices in how they are served.

If you are a customer service organization looking to offer your customers more value to tempt them from competitors, it’s time to go shopping for value-added services to offer them. It has never been easier and more profitable to do so.

VoltDelta Hosted Solutions

If you ever called 411 you have used
VoltDelta

For over 25 years, VoltDelta has provided more than 100 telephone companies Directory Assistance solutions. Now that same carrier grade performance and cutting edge technologies are available to all contact centers. From speech automation, IVR, ACD, and Multi-modal messaging, to outbound alerts and transport options, VoltDelta Hosted Solutions can enhance the performance of any center. Hosted Solutions – let VoltDelta take care of the technology.

Get started by contacting us today!

See our Channel "Call Center Solutions" on TMCNet.com

VOLTDELTA
HOSTED ***SOLUTIONS***

(610) 276-4300

info@voltdelta.com

www.VoltDelta.com/VoltDelta-Hosted-Solutions

From The Headset Experts

By Joe McGrogan,
Director of Marketing, B2B Solutions, Plantronics, Inc.

Fewer Headsets And Fewer Hassles

Superior service and support enables contact centers to operate more smoothly and with a smaller inventory of headsets.

The numerous advantages of lightweight telecommunications headsets have made them indispensable tools in today's contact center. High-quality headsets improve operator productivity, increase customer satisfaction and reduce employee turnover. Nonetheless, contact center managers can hardly reap these benefits if their agents' headsets are not fully operational. Choosing a product with a proven track record for reliability is a good first step toward ensuring you'll get a good return on your investment. But it also pays to look for a manufacturer that backs up its products with superior service and support.

A Guaranteed Way To Keep Inventory Down

Today's headsets pack an amazing array of technology in a small, lightweight package that must cope with the rough-and-tumble environment of a busy call center. Consequently, even the best product design and the highest manufacturing standards can't prevent a few problems in the field. Plantronics understands that contact center agents need to focus on their customers — not on their equipment — so if any Plantronics product fails to perform to the highest standard, it is replaced within 48 hours. Having the confidence of this guarantee allows contact center managers to reduce costs by eliminating the need for a large inventory of back-up headsets.

Headset Central

To complement this rapid warranty replacement and further help contact center headset administrators reduce costs and increase productivity, Plantronics developed a unique Headset Service Station. Designed by Plantronics customers, it's a place right on the contact center floor where agents can drop off their headsets for testing, replacement or inventory counting. Locking compartments can hold over 200 headsets and accessories, making it easier to control a contact center's inventory of headsets, parts and accessories — and allow administrators to quickly get agents what they need to get their jobs done. The station also makes it easy to collect, box and ship headsets for service. easy to collect, box and ship headsets for service.

By providing a single location for inventory management, this unique onsite resource reduces agent downtime, cuts down on lost and misplaced equipment and eliminates those mysterious boxes of broken headsets sometimes found lurking in the phone room. Better, more centralized control has the added benefit of reducing out-of-warranty expenses.

Plantronics' Headset Service Station

In addition to these types of service options, proper agent training can also significantly reduce downtime, while boosting agent performance and customer satisfaction. Plantronics has developed a series of online training demos that can help get contact center staff up and running on new equipment quickly. And when administrators or agents have a question about headsets or their proper operation, Plantronics provides around-the-clock technical support through a variety of convenient channels, including an online knowledge base, e-mail and live chat support, online resources, and 24-hour telephone support.

The combination of superior service and support options from Plantronics not only increases uptime but also allows your contact center to run on fewer headsets. In fact, you should be able to quickly decrease the number of units required to run your center, because contact centers using Plantronics equipment typically need extra on-hand inventory of only 10 percent for headsets and five percent for audio processors. And smaller on-hand inventory translates into lower cost and a better return on your investment. How many extra headsets do you currently have on hand? Maybe it's time to give Plantronics a call.

For more information, visit www.plantronics.com/contactcenter

HANDLE IT ALL WITHOUT MISSING A CALL

GO WIRELESS AND GO WHERE YOU'RE NEEDED

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

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

SupraPlus® Wireless

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

PRODUCT
CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions
2006
OF THE YEAR

PLANTRONICS.
SOUND INNOVATION®

© 2007 Plantronics, Inc. All rights reserved. Plantronics, the logo design, Sound Innovation and SupraPlus Wireless are trademarks or registered trademarks of Plantronics, Inc.

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

Customer Interaction Solutions Magazine's 23rd Annual Top 50 Outbound Teleservices Agency Ranking

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

Ranking Basis

Since the basis of our ranking is company size, *Customer Interaction Solutions* uses a measurable, third-party-verifiable aspect of teleservices to arrive at our list of the "Top 50" agencies: the number of minutes each agency was billed by each of its phone companies for telephone service for 12 months, encompassing November 2006 through October 2007.

Qualification Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in this year's "Top 50," the agencies were required to answer a questionnaire detailing the nature of their business and listing their number of billable minutes between November 2006 and October 2007. The questionnaire had to be verified with the signature of each agency's president/CEO. In addition, each agency had to submit a letter of verification from each of its telephone service providers certifying the number of minutes for which it billed the agency during the designated period.

Exceptions

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

Understanding The Listings

As you read through the list of outbound "Top 50" agencies, you will notice that we have provided a numerical ranking of 1 through 35 (1 being the largest), as this year, only 35 companies met with our minimum criteria of billable minutes to be included in the outbound ranking.

Category A is composed of U.S. service agencies, and Category B consists of international teleservices agencies. Again this year we have separated out all international teleservices done by U.S. agencies and ranked those companies' international minutes in the International category, Category B. Domestic companies that are also ranked in the International category are marked with a dagger (†) in their domestic ranking.

Companies with enhanced listings are regular advertisers in Customer Interaction Solutions or TMCnet.com.

CATEGORY A

1. Teleperformance USA †
www.teleperformance.com

2. Millennium Teleservices †
www.mmtel.com

3. ICT Group, Inc. * †
www.ictgroup.com

4. InfoCision Management Corp.
Ph: 330-668-1400; Fx: 330-668-1401
www.infocision.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1982
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 500 hours
Type of calling: B-to-B: 10%; B-to-C: 90%
Outbound: 75%; Inbound: 25%
Specialization: political, non-profit and religious fundraising; product/service sales and customer care; volunteer recruitment

5. Sitel * †
www.sitel.com

6. DialAmerica Marketing, Inc.
www.dialamerica.com

7. Influent Inc. †
www.influentinc.com

8. Telvista †
www.telvista.com

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

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

11. Teleservices Direct
www.teleservicesdirect.com

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

13. NOVO 1, Inc.
www.novo1.com

14. Cross Country Automotive Services †
www.crosscountry-auto.com

15. Synergy Solutions *
www.synergysolutionsinc.com

16. American Customer Care, Inc.
Ph: 860-267-0686; Fx: 800-267-0846
www.americancustomercare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1986
Type of calling: B-to-B: 57%; B-to-C: 43%
Outbound: 57%; Inbound: 43%
Specialization: Customer service and help desk, outbound b-to-b and complete interaction management

17. OKS-Ameridial Inc.
www.oksameridial.com

18. Charlton
www.tcgcorp.net

19. 121 Direct Response
www.121directresponse.com

20. NCO Customer Management Inc. * †
www.ncogroup.com

21. Protocol Services, Inc. * †
www.protocolmarketing.com

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

23. eTelecare Global Solutions * †
Ph: 480-477-1200; Fx: 480-477-1279
Web: www.etelecare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1999
Size of projects accepted: 100,000 minimum
Type of calling: B-to-B: 8.5%; B-to-C: 91.5%
Outbound: 9.9%; Inbound: 90.1%
Specialization: customer care, sales and technical support

24. Hamilton Contact Center Services
www.hamiltontm.com

25. Greene, an RMG Direct Company
www.rmgdirectinc.com

26. Americall Group Inc. (a Teleperformance company) *
www.americallgroup.com

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

28. AnswerNet Network
www.answernetnetwork.com

29. VXI Global Solutions †
www.vxiusa.com

30. APAC Customer Services, Inc.
www.apaccustomerservices.com

31. AFFINA - An HTMT Global Solutions Company *
www.affina.com

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

33. InService America
www.inserviceamerica.com

34. Alta Resources *
www.altaresources.com

35. Telerx *
www.telerx.com

CATEGORY B – INTERNATIONAL

1. Teleperformance
Ph: +43 1 54555540; Fx: +43 1 5455553
www.teleperformance.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1988
Size of projects accepted: Minimum 100 hours
Type of calling: B-to-B: 22%; B-to-C: 78%
Outbound: 54% Inbound: 46%
Specialization: Telecommunications, Customer Care, Financial Services, Customer Acquisition

2. Sitel *
www.sitel.com

3. NCO Group *
www.ncogroup.com

4. Teleperformance USA (a Teleperformance company)
www.teleperformanceusa.com

5. ICT Group, Inc. *
www.ictgroup.com

6. Protocol Service, Inc. *
www.protocol-marketing.com

7. PCCW Teleservices *
www.pccwteleservices.com

8. Telvista, Inc.
www.telvista.com

9. eTelecare Global Solutions *
Ph: 480-477-1200; Fx: 480-477-1279
www.etelecare.com
Year began providing teleservices: 1999
Size of projects accepted: 100,000 minimum
Type of calling: B-to-B: 8.5%; B-to-C: 91.5%
Outbound: 9.9%; Inbound: 90.1%
Specialization: customer care, sales and technical support

10. VOXDATA *
www.voxdata.com

11. Influent Inc.
www.influentinc.com

12. Millennium Teleservices
www.mmtel.com

13. Hispanic Teleservices Corp., A Teleperformance company *
www.htc.to

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

15. Cross Country Automotive Services
www.crosscounty-auto.com

TMC WEBINARS

Upcoming TMCnet™ Webinar Schedule

March 26, 2008 • 11:00am ET, 8:00am PT

Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 – Considerations for Voice Integration

Sponsored by:

applianx by Aculab

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/applianx-aculab

March 27, 2008 • 2:00 pm ET/ 11:00 am PT

IP Convergence Means Channel Convergence

Sponsored by:

speakeasy®

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/speakeasy2

Host Your Own
Webinar!

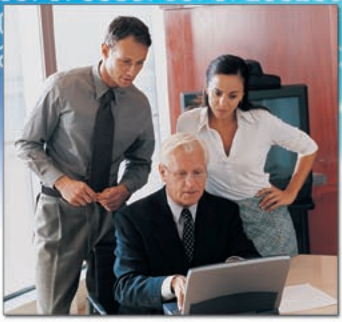
April 10, 2008 • 2:00pm ET, 11:00am PT

Secure SIP Trunking: What You Need to Know

Sponsored by:

inGate

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/ingate-systems



April 2, 2008 • 2:00pm ET, 11:00am PT

CRM Integration Best Practices: Taking the Pain Out of the Call Center

Sponsored by:

AMC TECHNOLOGY

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/amc-technology

April 3, 2008 • 2:00pm ET, 11:00am PT

Hire right, Analyze right, Train right – Secrets to Success for the Contact Center

Sponsored by:

PerformanceEdge

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/performance-edge

April 15, 2008 • 2:00 pm ET/ 11:00 am PT

Deploying Speech Automation Using a Hosted Solution

Sponsored by:

VOLTDELTA HOSTED SOLUTIONS

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/volt-delta

Archived • View Today!

Migrating from Legacy Voice Mail Solutions to Unified Communications

Sponsored by:

AVST

http://www.tmcnet.com/webinar/avst

Penny Reynolds,
The Call Center School

The Top Five Things Your Call Center Agents Wish You'd Taught Them

Rachel has just finished your agent orientation program and is ready to hit the phones. She's passed the product knowledge test with flying colors and seems to have better-than-average communications skills. She's actively using the new soft-skills she learned in the final phase of orientation and you're sure she's going to be one of your stars.

But you have this nagging feeling that you've forgotten to teach her something. You wonder, "Is there anything else Rachel should know before she begins her 'tour of duty'?" Is there any other training she needs that will make her more effective in handling customer contacts, as well as be a more satisfied call center employee?

The answer is "yes." There's one more piece. The missing link here is to equip Rachel with knowledge about the unique call center environment and how it operates. Let's face it — she's had to learn a lot in the last few weeks. And part of that training should have been an operational overview so Rachel can better understand the context in which she plays such an important role.

So what exactly do new employees need to learn about the call center? We asked agents and supervisors alike what the missing pieces were, and below is their "Top Five" list. How many of these areas are you covering in your own training program?

1. The profession and the industry. How many of your staff members understand the world of call centers? It's important for them to understand the vital role your own call center plays in the organization, as well as the bigger picture of call centers everywhere. Rachel should understand that this is more than "just answering the phones," but a mission-critical part of businesses everywhere – a bona fide profession, not just an in-between stop on the way to a "real" job.

Include information about industry demographics (types and sizes of centers, as well as the number of people who work in the profession). Make them aware of the career opportunities and professional development options available to them in the industry. This type of awareness will help your retention efforts in the long run, as well as increase job satisfaction in the short term.

2. Performance measurement. Do your staff understand what you're measuring every day in terms of the call center's overall performance as well as individual performance? It's useful for them to understand what the call center's performance goals are in terms of service and efficiency (and perhaps revenue) in support of the company's overall objectives. Rachel should understand how these call center operational goals then translate down into measures of her own performance.

Include training on performance measures, with particular emphasis on all the items an agent will be measured on and why. Every person should understand how his/her performance will be evaluated and understand what they can do to affect those numbers and scores.

3. Workforce management. Do your staff members understand why management is so obsessed with everyone being in their seat and adhering to their work schedule? It's critical for them to understand the basics of the workforce management process and the impact on service and cost of getting the "just right" number of people in place to handle the calls. Rachel should understand the effect on service she has if she's not available when scheduled and what that means in terms of how busy her coworkers will be.

Include training on how the forecasting and scheduling process works in your center. Every person should understand how workforce schedules are created, and the impact that just one person can make on service and cost.

4. Call center technology. Do your staff understand how the calls they're taking right now arrived at their desktop and what the customer has experienced to the point at which live conversation begins? It's helpful for them to understand the overall concept of how a call or contact arrives at their workstation, as well as what technologies enable them to handle calls more effectively once they arrive. Rachel should understand what her customer has experienced in terms of IVR self-service or sitting in the ACD queue before she picked up the call.

Include training on how a contact gets from the customer to the desktop, and what the communications process is like for customers. Every person should understand what technologies are available to them in handling the call more efficiently, as well as have a basic understanding of the other technologies that work "behind the scenes" in the call center.

5. Customer relationships. Do your staff members understand the value of each and every customer call? While we're not suggesting they whip out a calculator on every call, it is important for front-line staff to understand the concept of lifetime customer value so the proper emphasis on service is placed. Rachel should understand that while one single call might not seem that important, when the average value is multiplied over a "lifetime" of calls, every interaction can be significant in customer retention.

Include training on lifetime customer value and the critical role that each agent plays in customer retention and the bottom line. And if you have a CRM strategy and CRM technologies in place, it's important to help the frontline staff understand how that strategy affects them in handling contacts. Will they follow different scripts for a "high value" customer, or will performance measures change as more focus is placed on the quality of the call handling process versus traditional efficiency measures such as speed of answer and average handle time?

Including these five components in your frontline staff's orientation program will go a long way in equipping them with the knowledge to better understand the context in which their role is performed. Without this background, staff like Rachel may never perform up to their potential.

Return On Investment

Benjamin Franklin perhaps said it best, "An investment in knowledge pays the biggest returns." Filling in gaps in your agent training and orientation program pays for itself many times over in terms of increased call center operational efficiency, improved service, and decreased staff turnover. **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 frontline staff level. For more information, see www.thecallcenterschool.com or call 615-812-8400.

http://call-recording.tmcnet.com

TMCnet Introduces…
The Call Recording Community

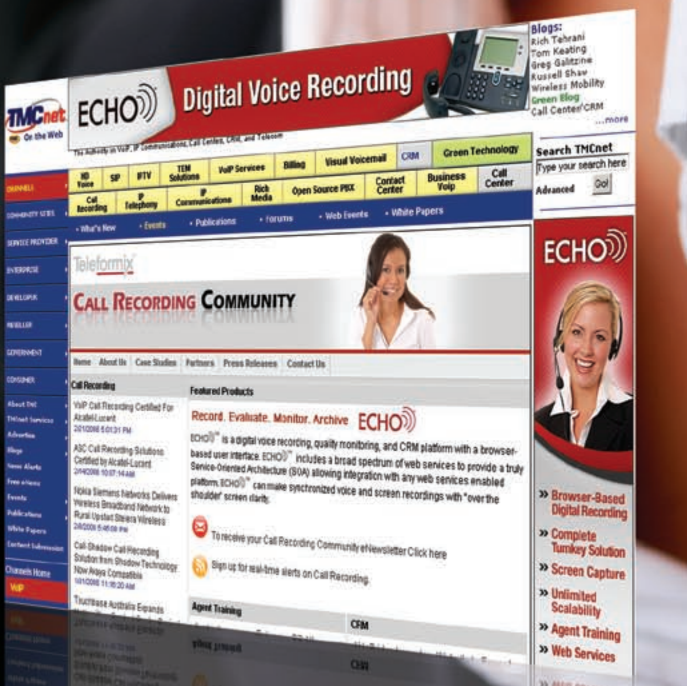
- Compare Solutions
- Review Case Studies
- Get Independent Research & Analysis
- Trade Show/Conference Listings
- Training Resources

Hosted by

Teleformix

Powered by:

TMCnet™


TMCnet On the Web
ECHO
Digital Voice Recording
Blogs:
Rich Tehrani
Tom Keating
Greg Galitzine
Russell Shaw
Wireless Mobility
Green Blog
Call Center/CRM
...more
HD Voice
SIP
IPTV
TEM Solutions
VoIP Services
Billing
Visual Voicemail
CRM
Green Technology
Call Recording
IP Telephony
IP Communications
Rich Media
Open Source PBX
Contact Center
Business Voip
Call Center
Search TMCnet
Type your search here
Advanced
Go!
What's New
Events
Publications
Forums
Web Events
White Papers
Teleformix
CALL RECORDING COMMUNITY
Home
About Us
Case Studies
Partners
Press Releases
Contact Us
ECHO
Browser-Based Digital Recording
Complete Turnkey Solution
Screen Capture
Unlimited Scalability
Agent Training
Web Services

Call Recording

VoIP Call Recording Certified For Alcatel-Lucent
2/21/2008 5:01:31 PM

ASC Call Recording Solutions Certified by Alcatel-Lucent
2/14/2008 10:07:14 AM

Nokia Siemens Networks Delivers Wireless Broadband Network to Rural Upstart Sierra Wireless
2/8/2008 5:45:08 PM

Call-Shadow Call Recording Solution from Shadow Technology Now Avaya Compatible
1/01/2008 11:18:20 AM

Touchbase Australia Expands

Featured Products

Record. Evaluate. Monitor. Archive ECHO

ECHO™ is a digital voice recording, quality monitoring, and CRM platform with a browser-based user interface. ECHO™ includes a broad spectrum of web services to provide a truly Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) allowing integration with any web services enabled platform. ECHO™ can make synchronized voice and screen recordings with "over the shoulder" screen clarity.

To receive your Call Recording Community eNewsletter Click here

Sign up for real-time alerts on Call Recording.

Agent Training

CRM

Predictive Dialer Owners, Is your Long Distance carrier selling you short?
($.01 per call) minimum
Call us to see how our 6 decimal billing,
(.001XXX per call) minimum
Together with our low rates, low loop prices, and multi-carrier diversity can save you 80% on your predictive dialer calls!
PARALLEL TECHNOLOGIES
Broadwing • Global Crossing • Paetec • Qwest • XO
800-846-3978 Ext 253
LD@ptcom.com

iiC InfoCision
THE highest quality call center company in the world!®
The ROI you want from the company you trust.
INFOCISION MANAGEMENT CORPORATION 25 years 1982 - 2007
1-877-893-3618 | www.infocision.com

altitude software
A global leader in delivering Contact Center solutions.
www.altitude.com
Toll free: +877-474-4499 | Local: +905-479-2655 | callus@altitude.com

Great Deal on Dialer
Two year old 22 seat inbound/ outbound predictive dialer with new server includes all hardware /software, headsets, cubes, and furniture.
Original cost of system/furniture $150,000.00+. Will take $70,000.00 or best offer.
Call Jamie at 609-304-5105

Professional Telesales/Customer Service Management Searches
- Search consultants to most of the top ten service agencies in the U.S. and over 50 of the Fortune 500 companies. Small companies, too.
- All custom searches using a 25,000 resume file plus extensive proactive calling.
- Dedicated telesales/customer service searches since 1981..the first and the best!
R.L. Bencin & Associates
Resumes welcomed!
2616 Hidden Canyon Dr.
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-6726
E-mail: rlbencin@netzero.net
Web site: www.rlbencin.com

IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

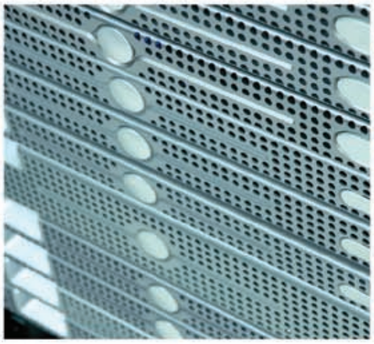
CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, One Technology Plaza, Norwalk, CT 06854 U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: **CUSTOMER INTER@CTION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

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

AD INDEX

AbilityOne .... cover 4
www.abilityone.org
Altitude Software........ 5
www.altitude.com
At Random 13
www.arllc.com
Autonomy etalk........ 3
www.etalk.com
Broadvox........ 33
www.broadvox.com/contactcenter.aspx
Call Center 2.0........ 29
www.callcenter20.com
CosmoCom........ cover 3
www.cosmocom.com
InfoCision Management Corp. .... cover 2
www.infocision.com
Interactive Intelligence 7, 27
www.inin.com
Internet Telephony Conference & EXPO........ 26, 35
www.itexpo.com
INTEROP 47
www.interop.com
Plantronics Inc. 39
www.plantronics.com
Sennheiser........ 19
www.sennheiserusa.com/adapt
TMC Labs Innovation Awards 23
www.tmcnet.com/1681.1
TMCnet Webinars 9, 42-43
www.tmcnet.com/webinar
Teleformix's Call Recording Community........ 45
http://call-recording.tmcnet.com
VoltDelta........ 37
www.voltdelta.com
Vovici 21
www.vovici.com

MANDALAY BAY



INTEROP®

LAS VEGAS | APRIL 27–MAY 2, 2008

DON'T MISS THE LEADING BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY EVENT

- VIRTUALIZATION
- DATA CENTER
- IT SERVICE MANAGEMENT
- GREEN IT
- IT SECURITY
- PHYSICAL SECURITY
- SAAS
- NETWORKING AND SERVICES
- APPLICATION DELIVERY
- STORAGE
- UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS
- VOIP
- WIRELESS AND MOBILITY
- ENTERPRISE 2.0

Co-located at Interop:

CSI SX SECURITY EXCHANGE

software2008

REGISTER TODAY TO RESERVE YOUR FREE EXPO PASS.

- **20,000 ATTENDEES**
- **500+ EXHIBITORS**
- **200+ SESSIONS**

Interop is your only opportunity to see all the latest technologies in one place and get the information you need to be an IT leader.

Register today to reserve your Free Expo Pass.

Enter priority code CMADNL08 at www.interop.com.

**Event is open to trade participants only. A business card demonstrating industry involvement will be required for entry.*

CMP United Business Media

©2008 CMP Media LLC. All Rights Reserved. A United Business Media company.

Irate Customers And How To Handle Them

By Tim Passios,
Director of Product Management,
Interactive Intelligence

Q Is it just me, or are customers getting more irate and belligerent? How about some pointers for my agents on how to handle troublesome callers?

A In the 17 years I've been in the call center industry, dealing with upset customers has simply come with the territory. But you're right. Customers seem to be getting more aggressive with agents, primarily on the inbound side. "Your tech support department is useless," or "I refuse to pay this *&^@%# bill"— and an often innocent agent has to bear the brunt of the customer's outburst.

That doesn't mean an agent is defenseless, however. On the contrary, agents are the ones in control, and they need to be able to show it. Here are some guidelines for agents and supervisors who have been around as long as call centers have, and they still work.

1. Keep cool, and don't take the situation personally. I know, easier said than done, especially when a customer is screaming at you about a problem you had no part in creating. But as a call center consultant once told me, "Agents who control their emotions deal from a position of strength." More than that, agents who get defensive and elevate confrontations with customers don't just lose business, they lose their job.

2. Listen closely. Let the customer air their complaint without interrupting, and take written notes if necessary to better understand why the person is upset. In most cases, once an irate customer knows someone is listening and is actually sympathetic, they calm down and are more inclined to listen themselves.

3. Gather the facts and assess the problem in full. As the saying goes, the customer is always right. Yet customers can also be wrong. Either way, listen attentively to get the person's point of view, ask questions and reiterate that you can appreciate why they're upset. This helps lower the person's defenses and gives you a better chance of proposing a resolution. Also, above all else, if you or your company made a mistake, admit it.

Conversely, if a customer's account record or trouble ticket proves they've misunderstood the situation, clearly explain that their frustration is understandable and then convey the facts from your end. Doing so allows you to question their complaint in a respectful manner, and move toward this next step.

4. Provide an equitable solution. There's nothing more important than keeping a customer happy while doing what's best for the business that employs you. Whether replacing a defective product or offering a billing adjustment (including certain times when the customer isn't right), issue a proclamation of "Here's what we'll do," and then do it to the person's satisfaction. If it takes $500 to retain a customer who spends $5,000 with your company every year, consider it money well spent.

Agents are frontline ambassadors, so things like continuous training, on-demand coaching, call recording and scoring, scripted "solutions" and post-call customer surveys prepare them to deal with irate customers more effectively than ever. Emerging technologies such as emotion analyzers that sense when a caller is becoming irritated will further aid agents in the near future.

The bottom line is that customer service is a people business, and the best skills any agent or supervisor can possess for diffusing an irate customer is to just be human — to listen, take a genuine interest in that customer and be a voice of reason. Those are called people skills, and in a call center they're invaluable.

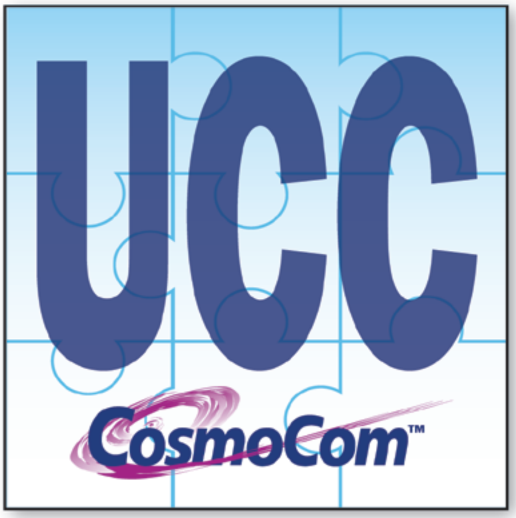
Agents, Tell Us Your Stories

Fortunately, not every customer an agent has to deal with is upset about something. Oftentimes, an interaction is actually funny or a little unusual, and we'd like to hear about them. The Interactive Intelligence "Outrageous Interactions" promotion invites agents and managers alike to submit stories of your most memorable customer phone call, voice mail, e-mail, letter, or Web chat. If our panel of judges selects your story as the most outrageous, you'll win a five-day/four-night trip to Hawaii. Seriously. (Or win $500 if you submit the winning "referral" story of another agent or manager.)

For entry information and official rules, visit www.outrageousinteractions.com. Enter through June 30, 2008; the winning entrant will be announced on or about September 1. Some of the stories may even be published in this space in the coming months, so happy writing! CIS

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.

Build Your
Unified Contact Center (UCC) on a
Unified, Consolidated (Not "Integrated") Platform



Everyone's talking about Unified Communications, but **CosmoCom** has the only all-IP, truly unified contact center platform for Unified *Customer* Communications.

All communication channels
One virtual call center for all locations

With most call center functions built-in and working together out of the box, and with standard software APIs that connect quickly and easily within the IT environment, CosmoCall Universe™ enables

Fast implementations
Low-risk, high-reward projects

And with its proven high capacity and its multi-tenant architecture with tenant self administration, you can reap these benefits for any number of call centers in your enterprise and **consolidate them all** on one platform, in your data center or through one of our hosted service providers.

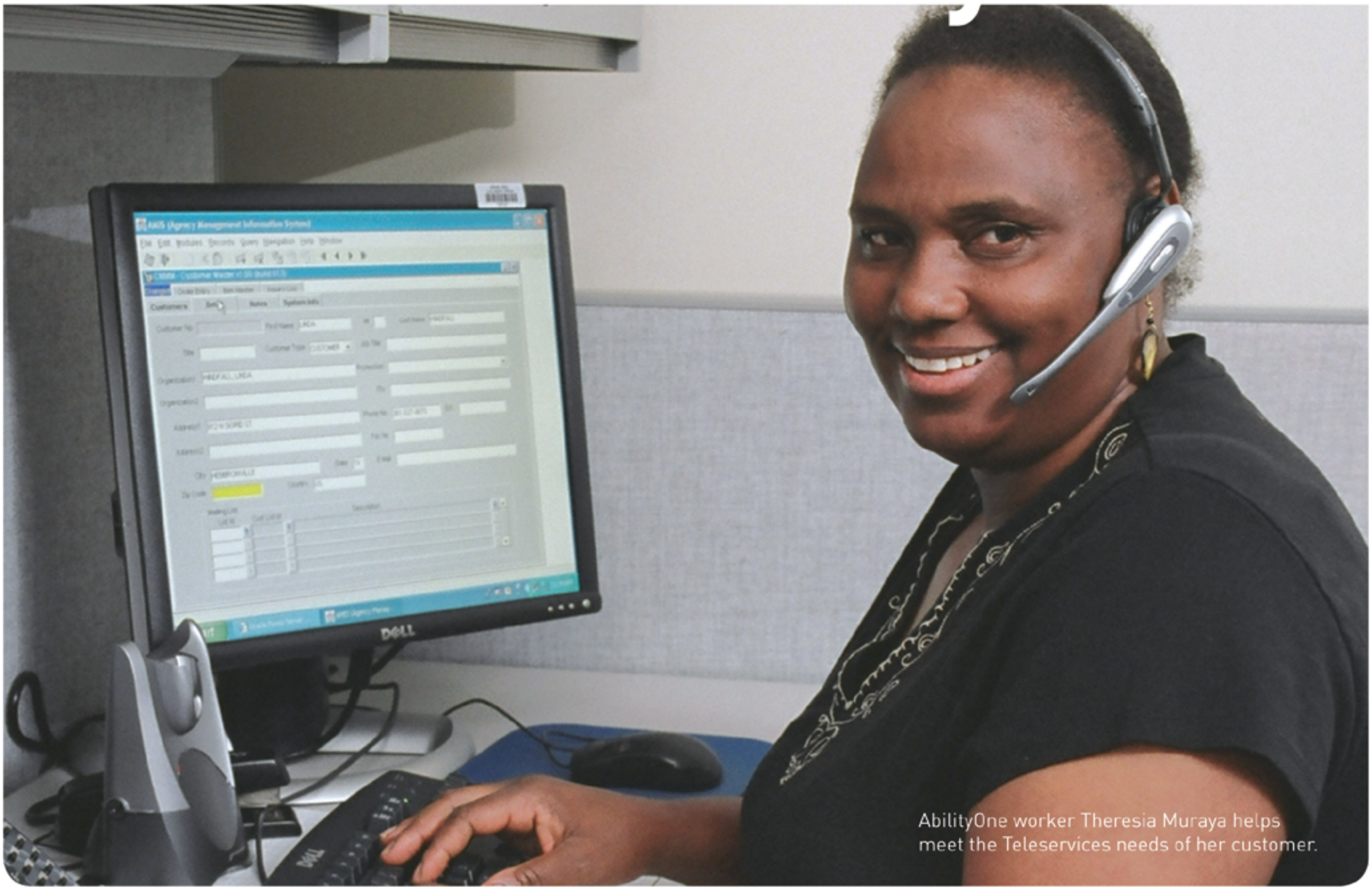
Puzzle solved!

Visit **www.cosmocom.com** to learn more and download
our Contact Center Consolidation 2.0 white paper.
To schedule a demo, call +1 631-940-4202
or e-mail info@cosmocom.com

CosmoCom™

Copyright © 2008 CosmoCom, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

accountability



AbilityOne worker Theresia Muraya helps meet the Teleservices needs of her customer.

With the lowest attrition rate in the industry (10% annual average), you can count on AbilityOne Teleservices to improve customer service and lower operational costs.

AbilityOne fulfills your federal contract needs while enabling you to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Our competitive Teleservices offerings include:

- Contact Center operations (including mail processing, warehousing and distribution)
- Help Desk services
- Technical support
- Switchboard services
- Answering services and staffing
- Field services and logistics (dispatch)
- Medical transcription
- Disaster recovery and redundancy operation

Discover all of our abilities at AbilityOne.org. Or to talk to someone immediately, call (800) 999-5963.

AbilityOne PROGRAM ★ ™

Formerly JWOD