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

Looking Toward The Cutting-Edge of Call/Contact Centers And CRM

Call Center 2.0: If You're Not There, You Will Be Left Behind!

Older solutions need replacing, not with newer models of old solutions, but in some cases, entirely new technologies and delivery methods.

As it is the beginning of a new year, it's time for this magazine, which laid the foundation for the multibillion dollar call/contact center and CRM industries, to focus on what's ahead for the coming year and beyond and share this critical insight with our valued and faithful readers.

Do You Have The Knowledge You Need To Make Decisions?

There are many important issues facing contact centers today. Older solutions need replacing, not with newer models of old solutions, but in some cases, entirely new technologies and delivery methods. These new technologies, delivery methods, services and business processes are collectively known as "Call Center 2.0," and TMC is on the forefront of it.

Call Center 2.0, which is collocated with our blockbuster show Internet Telephony Conference & EXPO, will take place January 23rd to 25th, 2008, at the Miami Beach Convention Center in Miami, Florida.

A Can't-Miss Event!

Why do you need to be there? You may not be feeling confident about your knowledge and ability to make the kind of business-impacting decisions that need to be addressed in order to ride the wave of Call Center 2.0. (And if you don't, you will certainly be left behind!)

As you face making new technology and services purchases, consider the following:

- You've heard a lot about software-as-a-service, but do you really know whether it will benefit your business as opposed to the older premise-based model? How does SaaS differ from the hosted model? What applications does it make sense for?

- What small steps can I take to make big impact on service levels, KPIs, schedule adherence, customer satisfaction, employee turnover and the bottom line?

- Where has CRM gone in the last few years? It's a great deal different from what it used to be. Do you know how and why?

The new technologies, delivery methods, services and business processes are collectively known as "Call Center 2.0," and TMC is on the forefront of it

- What makes up the umbrella term "workforce optimization," and why and how does it improve contact center operations as dramatically as it does? How can you take advantage of it?

- How can analytics help you to improve your business dramatically?

• How can you make sure your contact center is protected against serious security threats? How can you make sure you have a good disaster recovery plan in place?

• What are the benefits of going all-IP in the contact center besides the obvious savings on long-distance costs?

• How can I set up a virtual or distributed contact center?

• Can I take advantage of the array of benefits offered by home agents? If so, how?

Over 1,000 attendees are expected to come to the Miami Beach Convention Center specifically for Call Center 2.0. (More than 7,000 total attendees are expected to Internet Telephony Conference & EXPO.) The majority of these attendees are top-level executives, coming to the show to learn more about the latest technological and service innovations and to make final purchasing decisions on the technical products they need. We hope you'll be among them!

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Typically, 48 percent of attendees are company executives — CEOs, company presidents and owners, and other CXOs. Twenty eight percent are IT management: the people responsible for implementing and using the technologies. The remaining portion of attendees are call center management: those people determining the needs for the technologies.

What You Will Learn

Having pioneered this industry for the last 26 years, since 1982, and trained countless contact center executives, it's only reasonable to say that no other event addresses this critical horizon for the contact center -- or is even qualified to do so. Call Center 2.0 is exclusively the place to come to learn about the issues.

Attendees can come away with the following valuable information:

• Learn how IP communications solutions can improve efficiency, reduce costs and increase the level of service provided to their customers;
• Use IP communications to equip home agents with ubiquitous network access;
• Develop a plan to maintain business operations when disaster strikes;
• Learn strategies to seamlessly integrate home agents and remote workers into their operation;
• Gather research to choose between a premise-based system or hosted solution;
• Learn how to improve customer experiences using an "on-demand" services model;
• Improve the success of overseas operations using IP technology;
• See how advanced workforce optimization solutions can improve productivity;
• Plan their migration strategy to IP, ensuring complete business continuity with zero downtime; and
• Design the perfect distributed contact center.

In short, Call Center 2.0 is the "can't-miss" event of 2008. I look forward to seeing you there and welcoming you in person. CIS

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

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TMC CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions®
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TMCNET.COM ONLINE EXCLUSIVES TMCnet™

CRM More Attractive For Language Services Provider Firms In 2008, Study Finds
By David Sims, TMCnet Contributing Editor
Business research and consulting firm Common Sense Advisory has released its technology and business model predictions for the language services provider and software industries for 2008, predicting that LSP firms "closer to the corporate mainstream like acrolinx and MadCap will add multilingual functions, thus enabling cross-border marketing, CRM, and customer service applications."
Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1429.1

Study Shows IP Call Recording Fueling Strong Growth in QM Sector
By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director, Customer Interaction Solutions
How big is the workforce optimization market? Big, and getting bigger, according to evidence both anecdotal and scientific. In particular, the quality monitoring market segment has outstanding growth potential. DMG Consulting recently published its fourth annual QM/Liability Recording Product and Market Report, an authoritative guide to the contact center QM/Liability Recording and Workforce Optimization (WFO) market. DMG forecasts more than $2.3 billion in sales of QM/liability recording and WFO products will be sold by the end of this year, which represents a 10 percent increase over 2006.
Read the full article at www.tmcnet.com/1430.1

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

IP Communications: Technology and Applications To Be Key Business Drivers

What would the January issue of this magazine be without a few predictions for the future? In this case, I'd like to offer some insight into what's ahead in the IP communications marketplace. I had some help. Mark Ricca is Partner and Senior Analyst for IntelliCom Analytics. Mark will address the audience at the upcoming Internet Telephony Conference & EXPO, which is taking place January 23rd to 25th in Miami Beach, Florida. He is moderating two panels addressing unified communications collaboration and security. I took the opportunity to ask him to share his thoughts on a variety of issues and trends currently facing our industry.

RT: What trends are you noticing in the communications market?

MR: We see four major trends:

The accelerated adoption of IP telephony (IPT) systems in virtually all end user segments. IPT continues to go mainstream. It has been the technology platform of choice for the enterprise segment, and is now being adopted by the midmarket and selected small market segments.

A transformation from primarily hardware to primarily software-based solutions. Communications and business improvement applications are the wave of the future. Software and services are the major areas of interest for end users. Accordingly, software and services are the growth and profit engines for the provider segment going forward.

Intensified requirement for effective security solutions and policies in all end user segments. Breaches in security and privacy are on the increase in commercial businesses and government agencies of all sizes. The economic and credibility issues for the business community are significant. Continuously monitored and updated security solutions and policies are a "fact-of-life" for the future. Security is, and will continue to be, a "hot" area.

The uptake in managed services. Enterprises and midmarket companies are having difficulty in providing the resources (i.e., qualified staff and state-of-the-art tools) required to effectively manage the intensely complex applications and technology environment. Consequently, end user companies are increasingly receptive to the concept of managed services. They are subscribing to a range of managed services offered by manufacturers, network service providers, channels and integrators. This trend will accelerate over the next five years.

RT: Did 2007 finish the way your company expected?

MR: Yes. There were no surprises.

RT: Is 2008 going to be a better year than 2007?

MR: The economy will be a more influential factor than in 2007. But we expect the year to be the same as 2007 in terms of global end user and provider spending.

RT: What technologies have altered the market the most?

MR: The Internet, IP telephony and the range of mobility offers.

RT: How has Skype changed the telecom market?

MR: Skype has an interesting business model, but not a profitable one to date. It certainly has not met the expectations of eBay.

RT: How will Apple, Google and Microsoft each change the telecom space?

MR: Each of these companies has an insatiable appetite for growth through innovation in their traditional and new adjacent markets. In general, their respective and collective involvement in traditional and new markets is an absolute "plus" for users. Apple, Google and Microsoft have delivered products and services that truly improve workplace productivity.

RT: What are the brightest spots in your business going forward?

MR: Anticipating the rapid changes taking place in the end user, provider, competitor and technology environments. It may sound corny, but we enjoy dealing with the "human-side" of our client engagements and delivering measurable value.

RT: What are the biggest threats you see to your company's success?

MR: Three potentially: 1) Not listening and responding to the needs of our clients. 2) Failing to innovate. 3) Failing to reinvent ourselves every couple of years.

RT: What will conferees learn from your ITEXPO conference session this month?

MR: I am moderating two panels that will address two very timely and important subjects: unified communications collaboration and security. These are two critical areas in virtually all businesses. There are excellent subject matter experts on both panels that will provide timely, practical information and insights.

RT: Who should attend?

MR: Anyone involved in the areas of UC collaboration and/or security.

RT: What unique perspectives will you offer?

MR: Practical information and insights, based upon in-depth research and hands-on experience.

RT: What is the most exciting market change we can expect in communications in technology in 2008 and beyond?

MR: Recognition by users in virtually every business segment that technology and applications properly designed, applied and managed are transitioning from being just a business enabler to a business driver.

RT: Please make one surprising prediction for 2008.

MR: Video conferencing and telepresence technology and applications will (finally) come of age. For many years, video conferencing has been a solution looking for the problem. In addition, the technology was "good" at best. The new generation of video conferencing and telepresence offers are very impressive and are gaining respect and market share.

RT: Thank you for your time. CIS

Solving Service Levels With Remote Agents Isn't New.
How LiveXchange Does It, Is New.

Oh there's no doubt now, a "remote enabled" contact center (i.e. one with the added, *highly flexible* dimension of a remote agent workforce) can produce remarkable improvements to service levels.

And yet many managers are still a little reluctant to rush into a remote program, their reticence resting on the fact that the two "old" routes to remote both have undeniable downsides.

1. Creating one's own remote agent workforce is too much of a diversion of time and capital.
2. Reliance on *outsourced* remote agents is too detached both from a control and culture standpoint.

How about a new route? **LiveXchange** gives you a third way to go remote. We are not an outsourcer, we are a Remote Agent Service Provider.

That means we supply, over a network, all the technology, processes *and* people you need to recruit and run *your own* very successful remote program.

LiveXchange is a unique, on-demand, pay as you go service that is working extremely well for the service levels of some major contact centers across North America.

They can tell you. We are the right route to remote.

*Live*Xchange

More Information For The Remotely Interested.

LiveXchange.com, for an overview of our service. **ContractXchange.com**, view our on-line remote recruitment process in action.

Call: Kevin Hayden: Vice President, Worldwide Sales. **Toll Free:** 688-987-2255 **Email:** sales@livexchange.com

Customer Inter@ction
NEWS

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

Aspect Debuts Unified Command And Control

Aspect Software recently announced the general availability of Unified Command and Control, a new solution designed to enable contact centers to centralize their reporting, routing, administration and workflow management in a single console, resulting in reduced complexity, increased productivity and the ability to deliver an improved customer experience. Unified Command and Control helps manage as many as 40 different nodes for as many as 40,000 agents, either within a single site or across multiple contact center locations. Unified Command and Control, a key component of the Aspect Software unified approach, opens the door for expanded virtualization by increasing an organization's ability to manage and control multiple contact centers and applications. It enables contact centers to leverage existing investments in Aspect Software solutions while also seamlessly moving to new session initiation protocol (SIP)-based voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP) platforms.
www.aspect.com

Telrex Issues New Release Of Live Monitoring Solution

Telrex, provider of the CallRex suite of IP call recording and call center optimization solutions, recently announced CallRex Multi-Media Release 3.7 optimized for formal and informal call centers. CallRex Multi-Media software provides live monitoring of employees' computer screens, records screenshots, logs Web activity, tracks e-mails sent and received and provides comprehensive reporting on individuals and groups. Release 3.7 features improved desktop computer live monitoring and screenshot recording, enhanced e-mail support and enhanced tracking of both browser-based applications and Internet activity on Internet Explorer 7.0. CallRex Multi-Media, an integrated companion module to CallRex Professional IP call recording and monitoring software, is designed for managers who train employees, monitor performance, and provide insight into customer interactions.
www.telrex.com

Verint Offering Analytics-Driven Workforce Optimization Solution

Verint Systems Inc. recently unveiled an end-to-end solution for analyzing customer service effectiveness and optimizing workforce performance. The company's Impact 360 analytics-driven workforce optimization software and services were designed to help organizations striving to analyze and extract critical information from customer interactions to optimize workforce performance and improve the overall effectiveness of customer service operations to enhance the customer experience. As a unified, analytics-driven workforce optimization offering, Impact 360 helps organizations improve the entire customer service delivery network — from contact centers to branch stores and remote offices to back-office operations. The Impact 360 suite includes a multitude of new functionality across quality monitoring and call recording, speech and data analytics, workforce management, customer feedback, e-learning and performance management to help improve the customer experience across virtually every customer touch point across an organization.
www.verint.com

TLC&A To Open New Contact Center

Thomas L. Cardella & Associates (TLC&A) has announced that it will launch a new contact center in Keokuk, Iowa, bringing up to 225 jobs and over $4 million dollars of annualized payroll to the city of Keokuk. Anticipated opening date for the Keokuk contact center, located at 3882 Main Street, is March 1, 2008. Thomas L. Cardella & Associates will offer up to 200 entry-level positions and 25 managerial employment opportunities.
www.tlcassociates.com

Convergys Names Orr Replacement

The board of directors of Convergys Corporation recently elected one of its members, Philip A. Odeen, to be non-executive chairman effective December 31, 2007. Odeen replaces James F. Orr who announced on February 20 of last year that he would retire from the position of chairman on December 31, 2007.
www.convergys.com

Intervoice Offers Speaker Verification Solution To Banks

Intervoice, Inc. has announced the general availability of its banking application with speaker verification. Government regulations, coupled with the growth of identity fraud, are driving market awareness and the need for enhanced security, making features like speaker verification critical to institutions and individuals that are increasingly concerned about protecting their assets and account information. Intervoice Banking 4.0 works to combat this crisis by helping financial institutions offer their customers more secure access to personal data. Out of the box, Intervoice Banking gives financial institutions a way to provide voice self-service to its customers, either through speech or touch-tone. Customers calling into the system can verbally identify themselves, their account and their requests without having to traverse complex menus. Customers benefit from being able to interact with a friendly, conversational system that provides anytime, anywhere access to account information.
www.intervoice.com

Avaya Tops Alcatel-Lucent In Western Europe

Synergy Research Group and Current Analysis recently announced the availability of its Synergy Q3 2007 Enterprise Voice Equipment Market Share reports for the U.S. and Western Europe regions. Enterprise telephony equipment sales in the third quarter of 2007 were marked by healthy double-digit growth from Avaya, Cisco and Nortel in both the U.S. and Western Europe. Avaya posted the

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

strongest U.S. sequential revenue growth at 41 percent; however, this was not enough to take back the number one position from Cisco. Nortel managed to maintain their U.S. market share position and posted a slight quarterly gain in Western Europe. Alcatel-Lucent for the first time lost its number one position to Avaya in Western Europe, as it shed 4.5 market share points. Cisco moved up the ranks reaching its highest market share to date in Western Europe, and doubling its share position in less than three years.
www.currentanalysis.com/srg/#EnterpriseVoice

Teleperformance Chairman To Retire

Jacques Berrebi, VP of the Supervisory Board of outsourced call center giant Teleperformance S.A. and Chairman of the Teleperformance Group Inc., recently announced his plans to retire. After having consulted the different governing parties — supervisory board and Board of Directors — and very conscious of his responsibilities as co-founder of the Group, the 65-year-old Berrebi has decided to terminate all his operational duties as of January 5, 2009, thus respecting the period of advanced notice and all other contractual engagements.
www.teleperformance.com

Open Source CRM's Concursive Releases Concourse Suite 5.0

Concursive Corporation, formerly Centric CRM, a vendor of open-source customer relationship management, content management, and Enterprise 2.0 technologies, has released a new version of its core software suite. The new application, Concourse Suite 5.0, "integrates CRM, Web site creation, content management and Enterprise 2.0 technologies into a complete front-office product," according to the company. A Java-based application with a standards-based plug-in architecture, Concourse Suite 5.0 allows third-party developers to integrate applications and share data with key company applications including HR, financial, inventory and delivery, and logistics systems.
www.concursive.com

West At Home Agents Now Company Employees

West Corporation has announced that its work at home agent service has changed from a contractor model to an employee model. The move was triggered by clients' expressed need for strong agent management, including continual coaching, feedback and extensive quality monitoring. The employee model allows West to enhance the quality of its workforce by holding its at-home employees to a higher standard, by providing more comprehensive training and ongoing quality reviews. Many of the former independent contractors used by West have now been hired as employees of West at Home. By tapping into this large pool of existing talent, West at Home has been able to ensure staffing flexibility while effecting no change in ramp-up time.
www.west.com

OpenSolutions Alliance Finds Rising Interest In Open-Source CRM, Others

The Open Solutions Alliance, a non-profit, vendor-neutral consortium promoting interoperability and adoption of comprehensive open products, recently announced the key findings uncovered during its 2007 Customer Forum Series. The forum found the most widely used open-source applications included the application server Jboss, the commercial databases MySQL and Postgres and the Eclipse development platform. Software products such as CRM and ECM (enterprise content management) applications are also increasing in popularity. After meeting with more than 100 customers in five cities throughout the United States and Europe, the OSA found that "interoperability between open products" tops the list of requirements among customers and channel partners who are deploying these products.
www.opensolutionsalliance.org

Oracle Unveils Application Integration Architecture Foundation Pack

Oracle has unveiled Oracle Application Integration Architecture Foundation Pack, a component of Oracle Application Integration Architecture — the open, standards-based platform for business process integration across Oracle, third-party and custom applications. Oracle Application Integration Architecture, according to the company, delivers pre-built service-oriented architecture integrations across Oracle ERP, CRM and industry applications. Foundation Pack "takes this one step further," company officials say, by giving customers and partners "the tools to implement their own composite business processes across all applications."
www.oracle.com

NICE Wins Large Asian Banking Contract

NICE Systems Inc., a provider of solutions and services that enable insightful and proactive action for improving business and operational performance, has announced its NICE Perform offering has been chosen by a major Asian bank to help improve their VoIP environment. The multimillion dollar order of NICE Perform is an expansion of the Asian bank's NICE implementation and will be used to help the bank achieve compliance with regulations in their VoIP environment. NICE Systems offers advanced solutions that enable organizations to extract Insight from Interactions. With NICE Perform's Compliance Suite, the bank, which recently made the move to VoIP, will be able to answer to challenges in financial regulatory compliance and corporate governance.
www.nice.com

VIPdesk CEO Named To TelCoa's Advisory Board

VIPdesk, a provider of home-based contact center solutions and concierge services, has announced that founder and CEO Mary Naylor has been named to The Telework Coalition's (TelCoa) Advisory Board. TelCoa is a non-profit organization that brings together a diverse array of organizations, companies, and individuals with the common interest of promoting awareness and adoption of existing and emerging telework and telecommuting applications including virtual contact center services. VIPdesk operates a customer management outsourcing model called "homeshoring" that uses home-based agents to field various types of customer care inquiries. Industry analyst firm IDC notes there are an estimated 139,000 home-based phone representatives currently in the U.S., and predicts that number could exceed 300,000 by 2010. VIPdesk currently provides remote telework opportunities to more than 90 percent of its workforce. The company's remote team is expected to grow 640 percent by the end of 2007 to handle a planned 1,120 percent increase in call volume.
www.vipdesk.com

Innovative Solutions From The Remote Agent Service Provider Experts

LiveXchange

A Special Editorial Series Sponsored By LiveXchange

What Is a Remote Agent Service Provider? And Will It Help Improve My Service Levels?

How to meet mandatory service levels is a problem that dogs even the most efficient contact center operations. More bricks and mortar, or more outsourcing contracts, or more of both, were the traditional routes taken when service levels were not met. If ever there was a problem that needed new options, this was it.

Then there came the wonderful idea of distributing labor (and calls) more efficiently by using a remote agent workforce. The enlightened theory being that, because they don't have to commute, remote agents theoretically work shorter, more precisely scheduled shifts on a more immediate, as-needed basis. The result, a more flexible workforce that is far more capable of adapting to the fluctuations of the daily call flow and the maintenance of service levels.

Will Going Remote Help?

Of course, like all ideas, a remote agent program means very little unless it is implemented successfully. And while there have been some great corporate successes, there have also been failures. Gartner research found 60 percent of all companies attempting to build a home-based solution will fail.

The truth is, it's not easy for a corporation to go it alone with their own remote agents. A high performing remote program ultimately demands the development of a sophisticated, multi-layered business model, plus a commitment to a lot of extra planning, infrastructure, investment and time.

And that's why more corporations that want their own remote agent workforce now have the option to adopt a turnkey solution as offered by a new breed of service provider – the remote agent service provider.

Enter The Remote Agent Service Provider

Just as an application service provider delivers on-demand software over a network, a remote agent service provider delivers on-demand technology and remote agents over a network.

LiveXchange is the primary example of a remote agent service provider. The company offers a quick implementation (eight weeks on average) of an end-to-end solution that "remote enables" a client's customer care operations with an on-demand remote agent workforce.

The pay-as-you-go service provides all the necessary remote technology, infrastructure and business processes. Plus, the LiveXchange offering also provides access to ContractXchange.com, a unique online recruitment Web site where client corporations post contracts, can view an inventory of certified remote agent applicants and then directly contract them through the portal.

The service provider model offered by LiveXchange is one of the most efficient, cost-effective means of adopting and utilizing remote agents, it may also be the most compatible for corporations that wish to directly manage their agents as opposed to moving to an outsourced model.

If so, it may be that the remote agent service provider is the future route for corporations wishing to solve their service level challenges.

How Well Does It Work?

According to current client corporations that use the LiveXchange remote solution, going remote has provided some extraordinary results.

The clients of LiveXchange can be found in many different business sectors including energy retailers, quick food service chains, television shopping channels, retail chains and road service associations. And all of them have a great imperative to maintain their service levels throughout the often wildly swinging call volumes that are inherent to their businesses.

Here are a few indicators of their success so far:

An automobile roadside association:

- Service exceeding 80/30
- Average cost per calls reduced by 40 percent
- Remote agent calls to increase to 60 percent in 2008

A major energy service provider

- 80/30 service levels achieved
- 84 to 86 percent CSAT quality scores are higher than in-house
- 25 percent cost reduction

Just as an application service provider delivers on-demand software over a network, a remote agent service provider delivers on-demand technology and remote agents over a network.

A major retailer:

- Hard-to-fill timeslots now better staffed
- Remote agents now answering 50 percent of order calls
- Quality scores for these remote agents slightly exceed "in-house" agents (score of 95.8 percent)
- Cost per call has been reduced

Given the level of these results, perhaps it is time to think new and review the advantages of a service provider supplied, self-run remote agent program. It may take you to a whole new level.

Visit LiveXchange at www.livexchange.com.

A Shift In What "Outsourcing" Means To Business Today

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

Traditionally, the reason many companies have chosen to move to an outsourced contact center model was that staffing and running a contact center took too much time and effort and distracted the company from its core business. This remains a driving factor, but in these days of demands on a business to keep costs down, many companies are facing the prospect of offshore outsourcing without much enthusiasm: for good reason. Most consumers are wary of foreign call center support, either because they've had a bad experience with poor communication, or they've read about jobs going offshore and disapprove of the concept. The other bit of conventional wisdom that customer-facing businesses are coping with today is that, in these days of service commoditization, customer relationships can be ruined in an instant — all it takes is one bad call — and, therefore, quality is more important today than it has ever been in the past.

So what's a company to do?

The home agent model has been positioned as an alternative to offshore outsourcing. Without the need to pay for capital expenses like building facilities, the outsourced home agent model passes along substantial savings. But outsourcing is not for everyone. Many companies would like to maintain more control over their contact center programs. Remote agent service providers have been the answer for many companies that wish to take advantage of the cost advantages of home agents without the need to outsource their entire contact center. What does the model provide? Access to trained, professional home-based agents who can be brought online in an instant to cope with daily, weekly or seasonally variable call spikes, which virtually eliminates the waste inherent in overstaffing.

Quality, cost-effective contact center solutions and extreme scalability: all without substantial time, training and upfront cost outlays by a business. In other words, the best of ALL worlds.

Tough Talk: The Importance Of Headset Reliability

By Joe McGrogan, Plantronics, Inc.

Telephone headsets and amplifiers can represent a significant expense for contact centers. To minimize total cost of ownership, these products need to stand up to the rigors of tough contact center environments and still provide peak performance every day. In addition to repair charges, stocking extra headsets and spare parts, and other hard costs, headset failures also cost organizations in terms of less agent availability and lower performance metrics. So when deciding which headsets to deploy in your contact center, it pays to determine if the product has what it takes to stand the test of time. Likewise, it's good to select a vendor that has been around for a long time, one with a proven track record of innovating quality designs, conducting rigorous product testing to ensure initial quality, and a company that stands behind its products.

A History Of Reliability

The search for a reliable headset starts with finding a manufacturer with a history of sound technology and proven reliability. Plantronics began establishing that pedigree over 40 years ago, when the company invented the lightweight communications headset. Since then, the company's products have served reliably everywhere from FAA control towers to the surface of the moon — where a Plantronics headset sent the historic words "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" back to earth.

All Headsets Are Not Created Equal

This reputation bears out in rigorous testing, where Plantronics headsets have been demonstrated to break less often than products from other manufacturers. These headset comparison tests include:

Drop test. Units are dropped from a height of 60 inches (average wearing height while standing for headsets) and 30 inches (average desk height for amplifiers) until a failure occurs or until each piece is dropped 72 times, simulating 18 drops per year over four years.

Cable flex test. The cord connecting the telephone to the headset is flexed until a failure or 400,000 flexes, simulating 100,000 flexes per year over four years.

Boom rotation test. The boom is rotated until a failure or 40,000 rotations, simulating 10,000 rotations per year over four years.

Headset/handset switch cycling test. The switch is activated until a failure or 200,000 times, simulating 50,000 activations per year over four years.

Volume control cycling test. The headset volume control is rotated end to end until failure or 20,000 rotations, simulating 5,000 rotations per year over four years.

Electrostatic discharge (ESD) test. Voltages of plus and minus 8 kV are discharged into the product until failure or 20 discharges, simulating 10 ESD hits in each polarity per year over two years.

Storage/thermal shock test. Simulates temperature and humidity extremes that a headset may experience during shipment.

Beyond laboratory testing, the ultimate measure of product quality comes in the field. For the past two years, the average field defect rate on Plantronics' most popular corded product line was less than one percent.

The secret behind this type of superior reliability is tough product design, rigorous product testing and state-of-the-art quality control throughout the manufacturing process. Plantronics Reliability Engineers draw on over 40 years of field performance data to develop detailed performance specifications for every headset adjustment and articulation. Advanced statistical process control then allows Manufacturing and Test Engineers to continuously monitor product quality and to detect and correct problems in production before they cause units to depart from their specification limits. Finally, 100 percent unit testing ensures that every headset and amplifier built delivers the extremely high quality performance designed into Plantronics products. As a result, selecting Plantronics products can significantly reduce the amount that contact centers spend on headsets overall.

For more information about Plantronics' contact center line of headsets, visit www.plantronics.com/contactcenter.

Testing In The Call Center: Not For The Faint Of Heart

By Tracey E. Schelmetic, Editorial Director

The call center can be a jungle.

Well, not literally. I've been through too many companies, large and small, to count, and without fail, the call center is always the busiest, most intense, crowded, noisy and high-traffic part of the business.

Many solutions designed to make life easier in the call center — both software solutions and physical products — often underestimate the amount of abuse the solutions will be subject to. For this reason, rigorous testing designed by people who understand the intense call center environment is absolutely essential.

There are solutions that simulate calls, demands on Web servers, incoming e-mail, denial of service attacks, power outages, hacking attempts, system crashes and mechanical failures. But many companies don't employ them, and they only find out where their weak spots are when the real emergencies come into play.

Headsets should not be an exception to rigorous testing. The average call center headset takes a regular beating. Being dropped, sat on, stepped on, scratched, bent and possibly flung across the room in frustration (nobody ever said call center work is easy) is an everyday occurrence. (I've seen call centers in which one would be wise to wear a hard hat.) In many call centers, headsets are not dedicated to one user. It's not uncommon for different shift employees to share headsets, which means they are being adjusted (earpiece, headpiece, boom, etc.) several times a day to fit the preferences of different users.

Additionally, the turnover rates in call centers are typically high, which means that incoming employees are frequently inheriting the headsets of exiting team members. The chances that a departed employee and a new hire will have the same size head, same hairstyle and same comfort preference are minimal.

Headsets of sub-par standard can be adjusted a limited number of times before they break. I've seen it happen. I've HAD it happen. Broken headsets end up in a "dead headset" bin, and cost companies money, lost productivity and administrative time.

So before you buy another headset, inquire about the company's testing policies. Ask to see the stats. Try the headset on yourself, and put it through a full range of abuse (as in, bending, twisting, adjusting and dropping from a reasonable distance — don't break out the sledgehammer).

You'll probably find that there's no such thing as "a bargain."

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

By Brooks Mitchell, Snowfly Performance Solutions, Inc.

Mission NOT Impossible: Reduce Turnover And Absenteesim While Improving KPIs

Employee turnover continues to plague the call center industry. Some centers report annual attrition rates as high as 500 percent, and turnover percentages of 200 percent per year are common. At these levels, the costs and effort of recruiting, staffing and training are enormous. Worse, the hidden costs associated with poor customer service and employee job satisfaction are even higher than the direct costs.

Based on my work on over 100 employee turnover improvement programs in the call center industry, I have come to three conclusions:

Acceptance. Acceptance of the situation is perhaps the single biggest barrier to improving the problem. I wish had a dollar for every time I heard someone say, "It's just the nature of this business. You have got to learn to live with it." This stoic acceptance will never solve the problem and inevitably leads to solutions such as "beefing up" the recruiting, staffing and training programs, which translates to simply working harder to accomplish tasks which are not solving the real problem in the first place. It brings to mind visions of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp trying to keep pace with an increasingly speedy assembly line. It doesn't work, and ultimately collapses in chaos. When this occurs, many companies resort to outplacement: let someone else deal with it! Working harder at traditional solutions to the turnover problem is similar to "running faster and faster to the east looking for a sunset." Despite good intentions, it isn't going to happen. Acceptance is capitulation to a less-than-adequate call center operation which will, at best, never improve and, in most cases, will deteriorate.

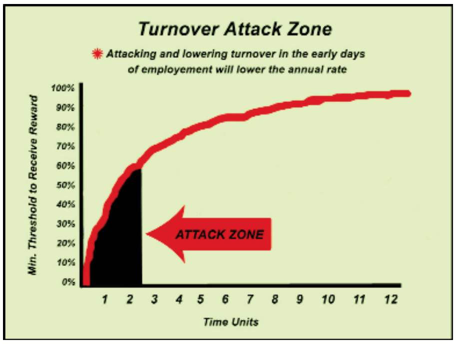

Figure 1

Measurement. Correct and specific measurement of the turnover issue is the first step in the journey to significantly lower employee turnover rates. Almost all call centers miss this crucial point. Specifically, turnover is measured and reported as an annual percentage. I have asked thousands of managers to tell me their turnover rate, but I don't believe one of them has told me anything other than their annual percentage per year. While this measurement has some meaning (mostly because that's the way it has always been reported), is a blunt metric and not readily adapted to one of the most effective management tools: accountability!

Isn't it easy to duck accountability for an annual number? Wouldn't it be much more effective to hold managers and supervisors accountable for metrics such as the 30- or 60-day turnover rate? Therein lies the secret of meaningful and useful turnover measurement. Measure short-term and more immediate benchmarks. Managers should track and report 30-day turnover rates rather than annual rates. This will make supervisors more accountable, and turnover will start to improve quickly.

Little improvements in the 30-day attrition rate will lead to big improvements in the annual rate. The first step is to identify the call center "attack" zone. In figure 1, this occurs between time unit (months) one and two.

After the second time unit, the line begins to flatten and turnover rates drop. My experience is that this curve is a reality for any company with turnover issues. Most turnover occurs early in the employment cycle, and that is where it must be attacked and that is where supervisors must be held accountable.

In figure 2 (on the next page), we can see the effects of long-term improvements that result from small improvements in the "attack zone."

In this example, an improvement of five percent in time unit one results in a 20 percent annual improvement.

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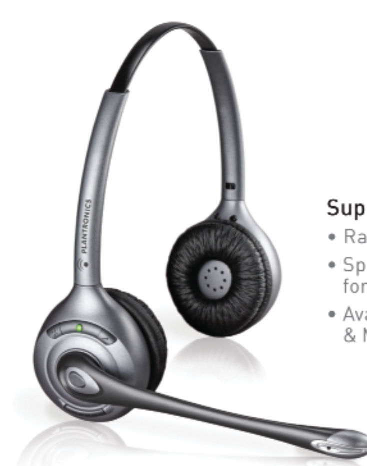

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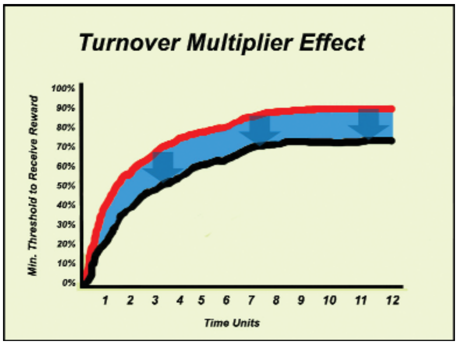

Figure 2

Put another way, if your annual turnover rate is 100 percent and the turnover rate in time unit 1 is 20 percent, a five percent improvement in time unit one is a "save" of one person. This one person "save" in the first time unit yields a save of 20 fewer hires throughout the year. It is like compounding interest in the bank.

The ROI implications of this are phenomenal. If, for example, the hard dollar cost of hiring and training an operator is calculated at $2,500, one save in time unit one results in 20 fewer annual hires and real dollar savings of $50,000 per year.

Early reinforcement and reward of key turnover behaviors. Now that we have established that most employee turnover happens very early in the cycle, it's time to make a paradigm shift and focus on why people stay beyond time unit two as opposed to why they leave. Study after study has reported that at the lower organizational levels, people stay because of positive relationships with their coworkers and supervisors. That being the case, doesn't it make sense to identify and reinforce anything which is likely to encourage and strengthen those bonds? A study by Dee Hansford stated that, "85 percent of front-line employees leave their jobs because there is someone they don't get along with, usually their supervisor."

Anything that nurtures job social bonds can improve the turnover problem. With that in mind, here are a few inclusion behaviors that should be rewarded:

- Coworkers who introduce themselves to a new employee on the first day of work;
- Coworkers and supervisors who go to coffee break or lunch with new employees;
- Coworkers who carpool with new employees;
- Coworkers who bring cookies to work;
- Employment and training supervisors who visit new employees to see how things are going;
- Supervisors, managers and coworkers who write personal welcome notes to new employees;
- Coworkers who refer a potential new hire. It is well established that new hires who were referred by existing employees are much more likely to be successful as employees.
- All group members when the new employee reaches a critical anniversary date, such as 60 days; and
- All group members who attend extracurricular events such as open houses, picnics, parties and luncheons.

If the preceding behaviors are rewarded, they will be reinforced, and if they are reinforced, they will enhance the improvement of turnover in the "attack zone."

A Call Center Case Study

A 1,500 seat call center had an annual employee turnover rate of 278 percent. The center had survived by a continual barrage of recruiting programs which barely managed to keep pace with the ever-present empty seats. The company invested in new work stations, increased wages and added a comprehensive health care program. Yet turnover did not appreciably improve. Then, the company sponsored an intensive supervisor training program designed to make supervisors more sensitive to the needs of employees. It didn't work.

Finally, the call center decided to implement many of the procedures outlined in this paper. The first step was to measure turnover in short increments and identify their company-specific "attack zone." This analysis yielded the results in Figure 3.

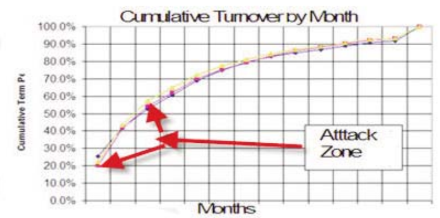

Figure 3

Notice that by the end of the first month, 25 percent of all new hires had terminated. By the end of month three, 52 percent had left. This was the "attack zone." It was also revealed that 92 percent of all new hires had terminated before their one-year anniversary data. The overall result of this attrition was an annual turnover rate of 278%.

The company used these data to communicate the new turnover measurement goals (30, 60 and 90 days) throughout the organization. New accountability reports were designed to be compatible with the short-term metrics and concentrated efforts were made to remove references to the annual rate. The new company lexi-

con included statements such as, "What is your 30-day turnover rate?"

Next, a comprehensive reward and recognition program was established to previously. The emphasis was to encourage behaviors related to new employee "relationship bonding" and reward all affected stakeholders for early turnover accomplishments.

To solve these problems, an online program was established which automatically rewarded employees with online game tokens when specified metrics were met. For example, an employee who referred a job applicant was immediately rewarded with 150 game tokens. The token recipient could then go to the company Web-based game room and use the tokens to play a quick, random payout game which yielded a range of 2 to 5,000 points. The points were then automatically added to a debit card which, in turn, could be redeemed at any place that accepted Visa cards. The net result was a turnover incentive program that instantly rewarded related behaviors.

Additionally, all new hires were "set up" with a token and online game account as soon as they reported to training. This immediately established a fun and rewarding training experience. Trainees were encouraged to play the games with coworkers, which facilitated the bonding process.

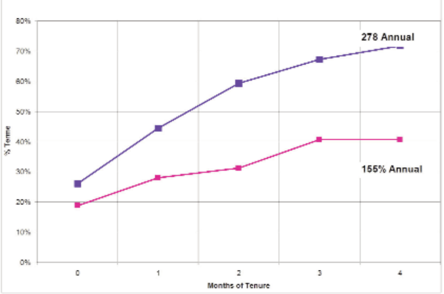

Figure 4

Tokens and subsequent games were used extensively throughout the entire training process. For example, training goals and accomplishments were broken into small learning and educational tasks and instantly rewarded.

The results were immediate.

Figure 4 shows that the 30-day rate decreased from 28 percent to 20 percent. Eight percent does not seem very significant until the compacted effect on the annual rate is considered. In this example, the eight percent improvement in the 30-day "attack zone" rate resulted in an annual decrease of 133 percent. Small improvements in the 30- to 90-day "attack zone" result in large improvements in the traditional annual measurement results.

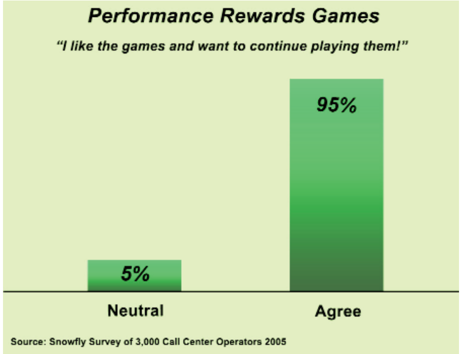

Figure 5

Immediate employee recognition was an integral element of this effort. Research has consistently demonstrated that employees who feel they are recognized for their work are more likely to stay with their employer. To determine the effects of the online game recognition component, an online survey (using tokens as a reward for completing the survey) was conducted of all participants.

Figure 5 shows a 95 percent program approval rate.

I believe the company is more committed than ever before to recognize employee accomplishments.

Answer	Answer Count
Strongly Agree	656
Agree	818
Neutral	268
Disagree	34
Strongly Disagree	10
Total Question Answers:	1,786

Figure 6

Figure 6 shows the perceived level of recognition. It shows that 83.5 percent of program participants felt their level of recognition (for the turnover-related behaviors) was higher than before the program began.

Clearly, the awareness, measurement and online recognition program had a positive effect on the reduction of employee turnover. Additional surveys revealed that job satisfaction levels increased, as well. One can only assume the positive effect this has had on customer service. Employee turnover should not be considered inevitable and a necessary evil in the call center industry. Those centers that recognize that the problem has solutions and that take proactive steps in accordance with the principles in this study can expect to move ahead of the pack. CIS

Dr. Brooks Mitchell is a Professor of Management at the University of Wyoming and the founder of two successful Wyoming-based software companies. The first company, Aspen Tree Software, was the originator of the Computerized Employment Interview and a pioneer in the Internet job application process. In 1997, Dr. Mitchell sold this company to SHL Ltd., the largest international company in the business of employee testing. In 1998, he started Snowfly Performance Solutions, Inc., which provides an Internet-based employee recognition and incentive system.

By Patrick Barnard, Associate Editor, Customer Interaction Solutions

Leveraging Speech Applications In The Contact Center, Part Two

Speech recognition and speech analytics are separate yet related technologies, and each is having its own influence on the contact center. As we discussed in part one of this two-part series (see the November 2007 issue of this magazine or visit www.tmcnet.com/1428.1), speech recognition has evolved rapidly in recent years. Generally, these automated systems are used for handling informational or low-value transactions, however, as they become more advanced they are being used to handle more complex transactions, as well as to convey the company brand, philosophy and culture through the "personas" they sometimes assume.

Considering the rapid adoption rate of speech-enabled self-service solutions across the industry, one might come to suspect that most enterprises would prefer to just automate every transaction and do away with their agents completely. Although many centers have realized staffing efficiencies from the implementation of self-service systems, most will tell you that the real purpose is to boost agent productivity and improve customer service, not to reduce head count. Organizations aren't buying speech solutions and then saying "Great, now we don't have to talk to our customers anymore," rather they are saying, "Good, now we can free our agents to focus on the interactions that mean the most." Most people in the industry agree that regardless of how sophisticated these solutions become, there will always be a need for the human touch in the contact center.

"What's interesting — and where we spend a lot of time working with prospective and current customers — is this perspective that you need to automate 100 percent of the calls," said Tim Pearce, Global Solutions Manager for Speech at Dimension Data, a global IT services company. "People get very emotional and attached to the idea of 'What's the automated call completion rate going to be?' Yes, that is important and yes, that is a business driver — but that needs to be balanced against customer experience. It wouldn't be too difficult to create an application with no dropout to an agent, so you are entirely beholden to the self-service application — and you will sit in that application until you complete your transaction or until you hang up. But that clearly is counter-productive. You need to bring the customer service element into it."

For years there has been a perception among consumers that organizations that use speech-enabled self-service solutions don't really care about the customer experience — that all they're trying to do is save a buck by implementing an automated system rather than pay someone to help customers in person. This perception has been perpetuated by the bad experiences consumers had with the early IVR systems, which generally didn't work well and merely frustrated people. Now, the only way the industry can reverse that is by demonstrating the accuracy and reliability of today's self-service solutions and showing that they actually deliver an improved customer experience. With today's speech-enabled self-service systems, callers can experience shorter hold queues and faster call handling time — the two main drivers of customer satisfaction — and perhaps best of all, they can be in full control of the interaction as it progresses through the various stages.

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Leveraging Speech Analytics

Speech analytics is software that analyzes or "mines" recorded interactions for the purpose of revealing trends in customer or agent behavior. Unlike the speech analytics solutions of a few years ago, which were mainly used to perform simple "word spotting" in recorded conversations, today's solutions can identify the context of what is being said, giving organizations the ability to more accurately categorize calls and gain new insights into their customers and agents.

With today's speech analytics solutions, call center managers can mine or search all call data recorded during a particular period and look for trends and the root causes of those trends. This is a huge advantage compared to traditional quality monitoring, where only a small sample of calls are manually listened to post-transaction to make sure agents are in compliance with business objectives. It can be argued that today's speech analytics solutions are the "new QM," however, it should be noted that most centers that have speech analytics solutions in place typically continue to monitor calls manually, simply because there are things that can be discovered through manual monitoring, such as quality of service, that can't be uncovered by speech analytics.

"With traditional call monitoring, you really only get a small sampling of the calls — maybe five calls per agent per week — but the agent might have taken 500 or 1,000 calls that week," explained Daniel Ziv Director of Business Analytics, Verint Systems. "Usually, with traditional QM, you're looking for only a few specific things like, did the agent do the opening correctly, or did they read the script on those samples. Now, that's valuable because if you have an agent who doesn't really know anything, then that will surface fairly quickly. But most agents do know something. They can handle, say, 80 percent of the calls pretty well. And that random sample might not surface their areas of weakness — like a repeat call or a call about a new product or a call that is challenging or emotional. Those situations are actually more important as they have more impact on the customer and more impact on the organization. It could be someone calling to say they're going to leave and the agent doesn't know how to retain them. Those can sometimes be missed using a traditional call monitoring program. So speech analytics can surface areas that the general agent population has problems with, and that particular agents have challenges with compared to other agents. To find these trends, you really need to look at a larger sample, and speech analytics looks at all of the call data, not just the one percent covered by traditional QM. With today's speech analytics, you can quickly search 10, 20 or even 100 percent of the calls. So it gives you a much larger sample — and can statistically identify real areas where agents need help."

Ziv pointed out that after identifying the agents who are having problems, "you can immediately drive additional training or coaching to them. We really see this as impacting the way centers do their quality monitoring, coaching and training," he said. "We call it focused quality."

Ziv cautioned, however, that organizations need to be careful not to overreact to one-time events that are not representative of an overall trend. For example, if it's just one agent who didn't handle one call particularly well, simply due to some noise on the line, "you might not want to send that training module right away, because it could have been just a bad call, or it could be that the recognition [software] didn't categorize something properly."

Most of today's speech analytics solutions are capable of searching recorded interactions in near real time, and thus can be used to uncover agent performance problems almost as they are occurring. With these "real-time" capabilities, contact center managers have the means to detect when an interaction is going "sour" and then take appropriate action — sometimes while the customer is still on the line. If a problem is detected early enough, a manager can send a screen pop or IM to the agent, directing them how to bring the call to a positive outcome, or they can intervene on the call, either by barging in or using whisper coaching, for the purpose of preventing a customer from defecting.

However, there is some debate in the industry as to whether real-time speech analytics is really "real" at this point. There are those who say that the technology has advanced to the point where it can now be used for this purpose, but there are others who say real-time speech analytics is the "Holy Grail" of speech analytics and is still a number of years off.

"There is this buzz going around that you can do analytics in real time, while the call is taking place — that you can see, in this interaction, that the customer is getting upset, and you're going to buzz the agent with some popup or extend the call to the supervisor — I don't really see this as happening, yet," Ziv said. "It could be that one day we'll get there, but it's hard to say when we'll reach that point."

On the other hand, some vendors see tremendous value in using speech analytics to detect problems in near real time and then intervene and guide a call to a successful conclusion. Those who are already jumping onto the real-time analytics bandwagon will tell you that once a customer is lost, he or she is gone for good, so it's in an organization's best interest to try to salvage each interaction gone awry, using the technology that is currently available.

Tim Kraskey, VP of marketing and business development at Calabrio Software, said although he agrees that real-time speech analytics is the "Holy Grail" of the contact center industry, it is possible to use today's "near real-time" solutions to salvage calls that have taken a turn for the worse.

"On one level, there's analytics that has nothing to do with phonetics — the analytics that understands periods of silence, inflections of voice, amplitude or speech modulations, things that have nothing to do with phonetics," Kraskey explained. "Then you add phonetics on top of that, too, such as George Carlin's 'seven words you can't say on television,' a competitor's name, and statements such as 'I want to speak to a supervisor,' and 'I want to cancel my account.' So it's a combination of both the underlying analytics along with the phonetics. Then, once you have that in place, you can do some sort of thresholding, so that when a certain threshold has been breached, the supervisor can get an alert and then silently monitor the call and intervene if necessary."

Kraskey said Calabrio has thousands of contact center customers that have had success using speech analytics as a quality monitoring tool to improve agent performance. Some of these customers, he said, are also using it with some success to detect problems in real time and then intervene on the call.

Grant Sainsbury, practice director of customer interaction solutions at Dimension Data, on the other hand, said he has "yet to see effective analytics in a real-time environment."

"It is still primarily offline batched analysis — and that continues to hold its value," Stainsbury said. "It gives you a chance to identify problem transactions — customers who are at risk of churn and try and make things right before they do churn. Right now that is the Holy Grail of the industry: real-time analysis."

Sainsbury said when it comes to call monitoring and intervention, the majority of his customers "tend to focus more on the screen and coaching the agent visually, in real time, through the call," rather than using more intrusive methods such as barging in on the call or using whisper coaching.

If there is one thing for certain, it is that speech solutions for the contact center will only continue to evolve and improve in the years to come. As organizations continue to realize the operational efficiencies which can be gained through both speech recognition and speech analytics, they will continue to adopt these solutions and use them to improve contact center (and enterprise) operations. CIS

The following companies contributed to the preparation of this article:

Calabrio Software (www.calabrio.com)
Dimension Data (www.dimensiondata.com)
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By Joseph Sanscrainte
Bryan Cave, LLP

Standards For The Teleservices Industry: The Time Is NOW

Years from now, when I gather my grandchildren around me and tell them about how old Grand-dad attended the 2007 American Teleservices Association's national convention, I imagine their eyes will widen with delight and they will ask, "You were there when they introduced the teleservices industry standards?" I will smile, and tell them about what it was like to witness the first step by the industry to finally take charge of its destiny by creating a program designed to: 1) protect consumers' privacy interests; 2) spell out the rules of engagement for inbound and outbound telephone communications; and 3) codify as much as possible the conflicting state and federal rules governing telephonic solicitation.

Admittedly, I suppose it's possible that my grandchildren won't be so impressed. I can say with certainty, however, that it was definitely an important event in the history of teleservices in the U.S. for the ATA to roll out a set of standards for the industry (available at www.bryancave.com/ata-sro). It is clear, based upon trends in legislation introduced at both the state and federal levels, that teleservices remains on the legislative radar screen. It is also clear that inbound teleservices is the next vista for regulation. An industry-wide self-regulatory organization (SRO) that promotes standards that encompass all elements of teleservices would send a strong message to the regulators that, like the advertising and funeral industries, no further regulation is necessary. It will also send a strong message that the industry has finally reached a point where it is willing to do what is necessary to ensure the continued vitality of the channel while taking seriously the very real concerns of consumers.

The SRO Standards spell out in detail best practices regarding outbound/inbound calling; state registration requirements; call monitoring; and policies and recordkeeping. The Standards also provide guidance with regard to calls by (and on behalf of) charities, and also contain an initial set of recommendations with regard to data privacy. Perhaps most important, however, the Standards begin with "A Teleservices Consumer Bill of Rights" – a bold statement by the industry that makes it clear that consumers' rights and interests come first, and that these interests played a central role in the creation of the Standards.

There are many innovations within the Standards, but perhaps none more important than the definitions. The definitions for the Standards set up a coherent and comprehensive foundation for everything that follows and create a common terminology that cuts across the conflicting and confusing terms in the state and federal laws. For example, when the Standards refer to an "informational call" made by a "service bureau" using a "preview dialer" to a "consumer" who is "former customer" of the "seller" responsible for call, you can be certain that you will know exactly which Standards apply, and which do not. This in and of itself represents a huge step forward for an industry struggling to deal with the many inconsistent terms used at the state and federal levels.

The Standards also reduce, wherever possible, the complexity associated with the conflicting rules among state and federal regulatory schemes. The sheer number of such regulations has made it extremely difficult for teleservices providers to maintain effective compliance and, as a result, legitimate consumer interests and expectations are not being met on a consistent basis. Perhaps the most important example of this streamlining has to do with the established business relationship (EBR) exemption to do-not-call rules. The Standards help to clarify EBR by creating three categories ("existing customer," "former customer" and "inquiring consumer") and setting up specific rules that apply to each. By doing so, the Standards help to remove much of the confusion created by the intersection of state and federal EBR rules. The Standards also tackle complex areas such as prerecorded messaging, billing authorizations and calls to wireless devices.

The Standards also take the important step of incorporating guidance and best practices based upon enforcement actions and opinions issued by the states, the FTC and the FCC. As a result, the Standards contain detailed instructions regarding the creation of policies and procedures, training programs, monitoring and testing of compliance and recordkeeping. The Standards also use enforcements and opinions to clarify such areas as in-house DNC requests, extension of EBR and in-house requests to a seller's "affiliates," and disclosure rule specifics.

It is, of course, important for any set of Standards to address the existing set of laws governing teleservices, but the SRO Standards go much further. Included in the Standards is a set of guidelines for inbound calling, with rules governing disclosures, billing authorizations and the use of IVR. This last category is extremely important: the one area most consistently raised by regulators for future legislation is IVR systems. The Standards create best practices regarding navigation, consumer interrupt, the use of plain language and, most important, create a "press 0" standard that ensures that consumers can rely on getting a response with helpful information upon pressing "0" during an inbound call. The Standards also introduce best practices for charity calls and answering machine messages, and also provide guidance with respect to maintaining the privacy and security of private information.

Although my grandchildren will probably just roll their eyes and think, "There goes Grandpa again," I can say with certainty that these Standards, by themselves, represent a significant, necessary and welcome addition to the everyday lexicon of teleservices compliance professionals. In conjunction with an SRO program whereby the Standards are effectively promulgated and enforced, these Standards will serve as the lynchpin of a program that will focus and strengthen compliance at all levels of the industry, and in turn serve to ensure the continued vitality of the teleservices channel for years to come. CIS

Joseph Sanscrainte is an associate with Bryan Cave, LLP; he can be reached at joseph.sanscrainte@bryancave.com.

The 2007 *Customer Interaction Solutions* Product Of The Year Awards, Part One

Each year, Customer Interaction Solutions magazine bestows its Product of the Year awards on companies that have demonstrated excellence in technological advancement and application refinements. Listed here are products and services that we've judged to have gone the extra mile to help improve both the customer experience and the ROI for the companies that use them. It is these companies' contributions that lead the way in making the contact center technology industry the dynamic field that it is today.

Here, we present the first part of the list of winning solutions. Part Two of the Product of the Year Awards will be presented in the February 2008 issue.

Congratulations to the winners.

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

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