Using the Call Management Process of Load Balancing to Create a Virtual Centre

A mega centre environment can be created by pooling resources from multiple sites into a virtual centre. This process of call management is called load balancing. The goal of load balancing is to create productivity gains that are inherited in larger centres with cost controls and flexibility that are found in smaller centres. This strategy provides for call centres to plan for combined workload while utilizing multiple resource pools. A multiple centre business model provides business contingency, local presence and a larger talent pool to recruit from.

When would an organization want to implement a load balancing strategy with their call centre operations?

- Two or more centres are handling common call types.
- A centre has saturated a job market for specific skill sets.
- There is a requirement to increase staff utilization.
- There is an opportunity to enhance staff skills to achieve business goals.
- There is a concern for business contingency.
- A centre is not achieving targeted match rate of calls handled by primary agents group.

The benefit of developing a call load balancing process can be measured by reduced operating cost, improved customer satisfaction and the opportunity for increase revenue. Staff cost will be realized due to a shorter call handle time along with a reduction in workload and a decrease in abandoned calls. Less abandoned calls will reduce customer call backs and the longer talk time to handle these calls. With fewer and more efficiently handled calls, the number of workstations, incoming lines, long-distance cost and telephony requirements is reduced. Annual maintenance which is equated to facility requirements may also be reduced. Increased in customer satisfaction created by shorter wait times and an increase in first call resolution creates a customer loyalty which leads to increase revenue opportunities.

The goal of load balancing varies based on operational needs, organizational structure, resources and technology tools. There are a number of scenarios that enable these goals to be achieved in utilizing a load balancing strategy. It is therefore important to identify the required result and the metrics used to measure success.

A centre can utilize load balancing options when there stated goal is to:

1. Provide immediate response to a caller’s request. In this scenario, skill sets and value of the call in multiple queues is generic. Product or service information is uncomplicated while call flow process is static and routine. Success for immediate response is measured using performance metrics such as percentage abandoned and average speed of answer.

2. Provide most appropriate agent for caller’s request. In this scenario, skill sets per agent groups along with value of the call does vary. As product and service information becomes more complicated, skill sets along with the ability to leverage the caller contact time is more important than just speed of answer. In this scenario, the key metric of percentage first contact resolution is balanced with overall performance metric of percentage abandoned.

3. Provide improved use of resources to create efficiency gains. In this scenario, skill sets per agent groups along with call value is similar. With similar product and service information, skill sets between agents along with the value of the call is equivalent. The key metrics within this scenario is agent utilization along with the metrics from the two previous scenarios.

4. Provide call type distribution for training, coaching and career growth. This final scenario uses call load balancing as a tool to provide specific call types and workload. This controlled process will create a positive environment to allow staff to exceed within the centre. Within this scenario, call balancing does not need to occur for all agent groups, therefore the metric for success will be that the controlled agent groups provide the same or better service standards as targeted.

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Virtual Centre Cont’

With the goal stated, the next step in implementing a successful load balancing process is establishing a cross functional team. The role of this team would be to identify the appropriate people skills, call flow process and technology tools that create the foundation for success. Implementation of a new process represents a period that an organization requires support and commitment to ensure that the change meets operational goals. Therefore it is vital to communicate, train and have a process to make staff aware of changes that impact customer contact experience.

Business rules need to be created to balance the impact of multi skilled agents versus queue priorities. When agents are multi queued and a greater volume of calls are offered over an extended period, lower priority calls would be offered unreasonable service standards. Load balancing based on best available agent need to provide maximum wait time for agent groups and queues. When this maximum wait time is exceeded, alternative agent groups, in a set priority, need to be queued to provide more opportunities for call answering.

The two call flow methodologies for load balancing are centralized and decentralized. A centralized approach captures calls in one central location where real time productivity measurements from all call centres is analyzed. Based on the business rules and technology used, a call can be queued to a single or multi agent group. A key requirement of success is that agent groups are designed by skill sets and can be located in multi centres.

In a decentralized approach calls are offered to a centre (i.e.: based on geography) and real time productivity measurements are shared between all centres. This data is analyzed and based on common business rules the call is transfer or remains in the receiving centre.

In both a centralized and decentralized approach there is a critical need to establish common business rules. These rules determine if a call is to be transferred or remains in the receiving centre. Based on the operational goal for load balancing, the call will be handled in the centre that can provide the best service at that time.

A centralized approach allows for a single point for decision making. Provided that a common communication format is available to capture the business rules elements, individual call centres technology tools may differ. With business rules being maintained in a single site, updates, along with trouble shooting is a simpler task.

A major limitation of a centralized approach is the single point of failure. Failure with a centralized approach has a greater impact on all call centres. If an incident occurs at the centralized point, no call centres will be transferred calls. If a single call centre loses communication with the centralized point, this centre’s agent groups remain idle while the other centres are offered a higher workload.

A decentralized approach allows for workload to remain in the centre the call was first offered to. In this scenario, an agent group is always utilized but potentially not to their full capacity. Maintaining a decentralized approach is more complicated due to each centres need to communicate real time to all centres along with ensuring consistent between centres business rules.

In either a centralized or decentralized approach, it is vital to plan for failure using network facilities. All toll free carriers provide service options to route calls using network features. Calls can be distributed based on overall workload, call type (provided that a unique DID is used per call type), geography, time of day and percentage allocation. It is highly recommended that a centre utilizes these network features within their contingency plan.

The final step in any change process is to measure the impact. Based on the goal that was initially defined, specific performance metrics for success are tracked pre and post implementation. Change within the performance metrics need to be tracked on a daily basis to create a trend curve that can be used for future planning purposes. Performance improvements need not be identified per period but a reasonable ramp up period needs to be defined with a final targeted result.

The load balancing processes will need to be modified to continue providing ongoing success. To create the environment for continuous success, results need to be reviewed on a daily or weekly basis. This will refine the knowledge and understanding of the load balancing process. Success of load balancing occurs when the operational goal is defined, a plan is created than implemented and results are measured.

About the Author, Louie Gazzola is the principal at Advanced Contact Centre Solutions and has over twenty years of progressive customer service management experience, contact centre planning and implementing technology-based solutions. You can reach him at 604.765.2276 or at louie.gazzola@accs-consulting.com.
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Richardson Partners with Witness Systems to Deliver Dynamic Learning Environment for the Contact Center

Richardson, a leading sales training and consulting firm has announced a partnership with Witness Systems (NASDAQ: WITS), a leading global provider of performance optimization software and services. The partnership will leverage Richardson’s highly interactive, Web-based Richardson QuickSkills™ e-learning courseware with Witness Systems’ eQuality® Now dynamic learning environment software to further agent development to foster career growth; achieve consistent, high quality customer service; and generate new revenue opportunities for the company through the contact center.

With Witness’ eQuality suite, an integrated performance improvement suite for global contact centers, management can evaluate and identify skill and competency deficiencies and then prescribe and deliver targeted training to customer service agent’s (CSRs) desktops. Richardson’s QuickSkills offer customized and off-the-shelf Web-based, instructor-led, and blended learning courses to address flagged skill gaps and teach best practices to agents. Thus, this integrated process creates a dynamic learning environment for CSRs to hone skills and continue career advancement.

“Our proven methodology of a dynamic learning environment is further enhanced with Richardson’s highly interactive, best practice training modules and is designed to create the most effective learning platform for agents to learn and retain important business information,” states Bill Byron Concevitch, director, eLearning business, Witness Systems. “This joint solution enables our customers to address some of the biggest considerations in a contact center including performance, training, and development needs all through one integrated solution.”

Heightened competitive markets, tighter regulations, globalization, cost pressure, and the demand for increased revenue generation have caused a shift in call center management’s strategic thinking.

This industry trend creates the need for more contact centers to focus on revenue generating opportunities and capitalize on upselling and cross-selling opportunities while interacting with customers. Underscoring the importance of building customer loyalty and retention through the contact center is the fact that customers who call into centers are more likely to do repeat business by more than 18%.

In order to achieve these goals, CSRs must possess, demonstrate and improve skills to effectively capture the highest level of customer interaction, revenue, and loyalty without compromising the need to provide superior and personalized service on every interaction. Coaching and training are critical factors in developing specific sales skills in agents and Richardson’s QuickSkills courseware is highly effective in helping agents develop those particular techniques. Such training modules include learning how to identify up- and cross-selling opportunities, creating need dialogues, effectively handling customer objections, and managing irate customers, just to name just a few.

“This combined solution between Richardson and Witness represents an unrivaled and leading-edge offering. The comprehensiveness of the components will allow customers to address their technology, performance, training and development needs. This unique solution will help our clients to provide their agents with a one-stop training solution that will build skills to improve individual and company performance,” states David Distefano COO, Richardson.

Richardson Launches Two New Web-based Training Courses for Call Center Agents

Richardson, a leading sales training and consulting firm, announced at the Call Center West Demo Conference 2003 in Scottsdale, AZ, the release of two new Richardson QuickSkill™ eLearning courses. The two new courses, Telephone Effectiveness and Managing Irate Customers, will help users to effectively identify and solve the most frequently encountered telephone challenges, as well as build the skills and strategies to provide exceptional customer care to customers over the phone.

Today, sales and service representatives must be able to leverage all communication opportunities and maximize every customer touch point to satisfy customer needs. Because the telephone can be impersonal and there are often time pressures, it is critical to communicate in a courteous, confident, and professional manner. Richardson’s new Telephone Effectiveness and Managing Irate Customers are highly interactive eLearning courses that have been designed to provide Call Center Agents, Customer Service Representatives and Sales Professionals with the ability to manage tough calls, handle negative customers, and
Richardson continued

optimize their telephone selling skills to strengthen customer satisfaction. The new courses include:

- Telephone Effectiveness - Identifies the most frequently encountered telephone challenges as well as the skills and strategies to provide exceptional customer care to customers. Topics include: Empathy, Ownership and Action Steps, Final Impression, Insurmountable Obstacles, and Crossing the Line.

- Managing Irate Customers – Helps develop the strategies and skills to turn many challenging or irate customer situations into positive experiences for the customer and sales person. Topics include: Etiquette, Voice, Holds, Transfers, Questions You Can’t Answer, Obstacles, Voice Mail.

About Richardson QuickSkills™

Richardson QuickSkills are ground breaking in their level of interaction and individual coaching and feedback. The courses are designed for sales and service professionals – fast, bite-sized, and substantive. Users work through high-impact simulations where they face real-life challenges, experience immediate application, and receive intensive coaching and feedback to develop skills to improve performance. Each Richardson QuickSkills is made up of 3 integrated parts:

- A 20-minute completely interactive simulation - provides intensive feedback and coaching and meets the time pressure of representatives and agents
- A 30-minute robust training resource center - contains role plays, definitions, and an eTrainer
- An interactive assessment test with individual action plan

Synchronous learning events and real deal coaching, Richardson partners with Centra. Centra (NASDAQ:CTRA) is the world’s leading provider of software infrastructure and ASP services for eLearning and business collaboration.

Genesys Expands Its Hosted Contact Center Solutions to Meet Market Demand

Genesys Managed Services Suite Delivers New Standards of Control, Choice and Intelligence for Companies of Any Size

Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Inc., a subsidiary of Alcatel (NYSE: ALA, Paris: CGEP.PA), has introduced a Managed Services Suite that provides businesses with new standards of control, choice and intelligence in hosted call center solutions. The Genesys Managed Services Suite, designed to be delivered by telecommunications companies, service providers and systems integrators, will enable enterprises to reap the benefits of a premise-based customer interaction solution in a cost-effective and maintenance-free service. Designed to meet the needs of enterprise customers, the Genesys Managed Services Suite provides: · Control: Web-based, intuitive interface puts the control of applications, business logic and customer data in the hands of the enterprise. · Choice: Unrivaled telecom and CRM infrastructure choice allows companies to leverage existing investments. Enhanced services are available in IP, TDM, or combined telephony environments. · Intelligence: Real-time information and business analytics enable a level of intelligence formerly available only in premise-based solutions. The Genesys Managed Services Suite enables deployment of the following capabilities, individually or in combination: · 800 Service users can now enhance their customer interactions with voice prompts from the network and routing menus that can be managed through an easy-to-use HTML Web interface. Enterprises using Web servers can add Web-based transactions and exchange information via any phone. · Contact centers currently using computer telephony integration (CTI) can supplement their customer service with intelligent network routing and call parking services.

NEC America Introduces Advanced Monitoring Solution For Multimedia Contact Centers

Global Navigator 5.0 Delivers Enterprise-Wide Management for Contact Centers Across Multiple Sites

NEC America, Inc. (NEC), a leading provider of innovative communications products, solutions and
Our contact center,” said Anne Russ, customer service supervisor, Massachusetts Medical Society. “We can now get real-time analysis and reports that help us plan staffing requirements, measure resource utilization and monitor individual representative performance. We expect the ease of obtaining and interpreting the information from Global Navigator to positively influence our performance, particularly during peak calling periods.” The new solution has been ported from SCO UNIX to the Linux operating system, offering more flexibility, lower-cost and a simpler installation. Similarly, Global Navigator replaced all proprietary databases with MySQL. MySQL will serve as the central data management hub, storing and managing all call data and other vital statistics for Global Navigator. Known for its high performance and reliability, MySQL is a cost-effective data management solution that provides a streamlined architecture to make handling large amounts of data from multiple contact centers simpler and more time-efficient. “We believe Global Navigator 5.0 will set the stage for many new features in our contact center applications,” said Mike Rosen, general manager of NEC’s Marketing Sales and Support Division. “By adding a flexible, high performing management delivery system, and leveraging existing customer investments, we are meeting our customer demands and making NEC the contact center solution of choice.”

Allied Home Mortgage Selects Sprint and Gryphon Networks to Proactively Tackle Do Not Call Regulations

Company Employs New Technology to Provide Compliance While Improving Agent Productivity

Allied Home Mortgage Capital Corp has announced that it is implementing Do Not Call (DNC) technology from Sprint (NYSE: FON, PCS) and Gryphon Networks, a leader in automated Do Not Call management solutions for businesses, in a move to help all 700 of its branch locations fully comply with federal and state DNC laws. In the first 5 days alone of service implementation, Sprint and Gryphon eliminated potentially millions of dollars in liability exposure for Allied by automatically blocking call attempts to any consumer whose telephone number is registered on a state or federal DNC list.

Allied was named by Mortgage Technology magazine as one of the top twenty-five Tech-Savvy lending firms. The agreement with Sprint and Gryphon continues a long-standing commitment to leveraging technology to improve business operations. Under the agreement, all of Allied’s branch locations will use Gryphon Networks’ technology, delivered via Sprint’s nationwide all-digital, fiber-optic network, automatically blocking calls on DNC lists so that outbound sales calls from any Allied agents do not violate any state or federal DNC law, or any restricted calling hour statute.

With Sprint and Gryphon Networks, if a number is called that is on any DNC list, or if the call is attempted outside of permissible calling hours, the call is intercepted before the first ring. The caller is audibly notified that the call is blocked and why,” said Ron Litt, senior vice president, Allied Home Mortgage. “If an agent receives a request to be placed on the company’s DNC list, the caller simply hits a two-digit touchtone key code to instantly add the customer’s number to Allied’s internal DNC list. Importantly, since the technology works in real-time, once the two-digit function is activated, all future calls from any Allied agents are automatically blocked and costly call violations prevented.”

Sprint and Gryphon Networks offer a true end-to-end, automated DNC compliance...
Noble Systems’ VoIP Technology Offers Remote/Offshore Solutions that Lower the Cost of Customer Contacts

VoIP technology increases contact center capacity without increasing bandwidth.

Noble Systems Corporation, a global provider of contact center technology solutions, introduces Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) for the ATOMS® contact center technology suite. The VoIP solution from Noble Systems offers many benefits, including support for remote/offshore agent configurations and reduced maintenance costs.

VoIP technology uses “packet-switching” to provide several advantages over traditional circuit switching. For example, packet switching allows several telephone calls to occupy the amount of space occupied by only one in a circuit-switched network, allowing you to do more with your existing bandwidth.

The VoIP solution from Noble Systems uses Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). SIP is quickly gaining popularity as the preferred telephony approach. SIP offers an alternative to TAPI-based IP telephony models, eliminating the need for a separate IP-PBX and contact center solution, and is the emerging standard for session control for a variety of other communications mediums.

Noble Systems’ VoIP platform is an ideal solution for supporting remote or offshore telecom routing configurations to distributed agents and virtual contact centers. With flexible circuit telephony and IP telephony capabilities, organizations can easily migrate to new architectures and move applications to new locations, without undertaking the time and expense of rewriting software. This flexibility is especially cost-effective for organizations currently utilizing emerging voice technologies, or looking to move to distributed architectures in the future.

Together, Sprint and Gryphon Networks are working to help businesses meet the challenge of DNC compliance.

“Sprint has worked with Allied Mortgage for several years delivering voice, data and wireless solutions. We understand their business priorities,” said Nancy Salisbury, area vice president, Sprint Business - Southwest. “Sprint was able to build on this understanding by bringing together our own resources and those of Gryphon Networks to deliver a critical technology to our customer and help them meet the customer and compliance demands of the new DNC legislation.”

The DNC technology is augmented by call accounting and management reports that are accessible to managers remotely, via the Web. For the first time, Allied’s managers gain real-time, on-demand visibility into the calling activity of all agents, in all branch locations. Reports detail a host of data, including numbers dialed, time of dial, connection status, call duration, and custom call events that the agents may enter immediately following a call to flag future actions needed. As a result of its real-time compliance and easy reporting capabilities, this technology boosts agent and office productivity, while simplifying management of outbound campaigns.

The Noble Systems VoIP platform is ideal for businesses meeting the demands of the new DNC legislation.

Since the National Do Not Call Registry went live on October 1, we’ve seen a substantial increase in blocked calls for all customers,” said Keith Fotta, CEO, Gryphon Networks. “With each blocked call representing a potential of up to $11,000 in eliminated exposure, compliance-conscious customers are seeing the value of DNC technology more acutely. Allied’s experience is entirely consistent with the surge the rest of our client base has seen. We’re pleased and proud to call Allied a customer. They’re clearly continuing their commitment to maintaining a leadership role in their industry.”

Sprint and Gryphon Networks are in a unique position, as Sprint operates a 100-percent, digital, fiber-optic nationwide network based on reliable SONET technology with service to all U.S. locations and a global footprint to terminate toll-free calls to any Sprint-served country, and Gryphon offers leading DNC compliance and call management applications.

Brink’s Call Center Implements e-Learning Solution

Irving, Tex.-based Brink’s Home Security has purchased a comprehensive e-learning solution based on a combination of software and services from Pathlore Software Corp., a maker of learning-management systems (LMS), and Computer Associates International, Inc. (NYSE: CA). The 2,500-employee Texas firm will use the e-learning solution to...
improve business operations by offering consistent, around-the-clock learning and reducing training costs and employee turnover. “The combination of Pathlore’s Learning Management System with CA’s CleverPath Portal solution offers a comprehensive educational system that is easily accessible and manageable,” said Bill D’Amico, vice president of worldwide sales and services at Pathlore. CA’s CleverPath Portal gives Brink’s Home Security a single point of entry from which employees can connect to the LMS and any number of applications or files. Along with giving Brink’s access to the LMS, CA’s CleverPath Portal will provide Brink’s Home Security with an enterprise search capability, which creates a repository of knowledge for employees throughout the company in areas such as customer support, marketing, and sales. Easy access to information is intended to increase the quality of teamwork and the speed of decision-making. Brink’s portal implementation, named “My Biz,” will be used initially as a central point for company communications. Pathlore’s LMS, which is launched from CA’s CleverPath Portal, offers Brink’s a system for delivering training while assessing its value. “By launching the LMS, Brink’s can analyze what employees learn and give managers a way to create and view personalized education plans for team members,” said Stacey Rapier, vice president of human resources at Brink’s. This gives Brink’s a high-tech way to gauge workers’ performance relative to the amount of training completed. Pathlore’s product also facilitates the export of data with Lawson’s human resource software. And that, for example, lets Brink’s include training records in employee reviews. Employees can use the LMS to access online courses, too. Many of these courses serve as an introduction to classroom training. More than 90 online classes are currently offered to employees including telephone etiquette, Brink’s 10-step sales process, and alarm system troubleshooting. With software and services from CA and Pathlore, Brink’s has one entry point for tapping the organization’s collective knowledge. Current research suggests Brink’s investment in e-learning will pay dividends. For example, Rochester, N.Y.-based Harris Interactive’s study of 1,000 U.S. employees found that 61 percent of workers who receive training, education, or mentoring are “very likely” to stay in their jobs for the next five years. “Turnover is often precipitated by a lack of consistent training. Hence the employee does not gain a complete understanding of business processes and experiences job frustration and dissatisfaction,” said Christina Parr, learning and development manager for Brink’s. “With an education portal and LMS, we’ll boost revenue by better preparing all of our employees with an easy way to acquire essential know-how about Brink’s Home Security.” While Brink’s strategy employs the latest technology, the thinking is rooted in research from the 1920s. From 1924 to 1927, anthropologist George Elton Mayo studied American workers and found that access to training improves morale and productivity. “The business value of the resources made available to employees is directly proportional to the ease with which employees can find and use those resources,” said Shari Shore, CA’s director of CleverPath brand marketing. “By providing employees with simplified access, CleverPath Portal is ensuring that Brink’s Home Security realizes the highest possible return on its investments in intranet-based training and information systems.” For Brink’s, offering online courses along with classroom instruction will trim instructors’ fees, reduce time spent out of the office, improve consistency and tracking, and cut the cost of flying employees to training sites. “E-learning gives employees career development opportunities and the ability to choose the time, place, and pace of learning,” said Kathy Harris, vice president for technology research firm Gartner Inc. “E-learning systems can deliver at a fraction of the cost of classroom learning.” Brink’s Home Security serves more than 760,000 customers. At its National Service Center in Irving, Texas, the home security firm monitors alarms and assists customers 24 hours a day.

INTERACTIVE INTELLIGENCE NAMES STEPHEN R. HEAD AS CFO

Interactive Intelligence Inc. (Nasdaq: ININ), a global developer of software for IP telephony, contact center automation and unified communications, today named Stephen R. Head as its new chief financial officer. Head’s more than 25 years’ financial management experience includes assistance with high-tech company initial public offerings, investor and analyst relations, strategic planning, rapid growth management, acquisitions and divestitures, and administration structuring and management. He will assume the role of chief financial officer on Nov. 14, replacing Keith A. Midkiff, who is resigning, effective the same day, to pursue an opportunity with a private firm. “Keith has done a great job helping us with the increasing demands of being a public company in the Sarbanes-Oxley era,” said Dr. Donald E. Brown, president and chief executive officer for Interactive Intelligence. “He has laid an excellent foundation of conservative financial policies and efficient reporting. We understand and support his
decision to move to a small private firm as his next challenge. We are gratified to be able to replace him immediately with a person of Steve Head's experience. Steve was CFO at my previous software company and has worked closely in the past with almost every member of the Interactive Intelligence executive management team. We are confident that the transition will be a smooth one.”

Head has been chief financial officer for Web security applications developer, Gilian Technologies Ltd., since 2001. Head had been chief financial officer for e-commerce company, planet U, Inc., from 1999 to 2001. Prior positions include vice president of finance and chief financial officer for Indianapolis-based Made2Manage Systems, Inc. and Software Artistry, Inc., both of which Head managed through their initial public offerings and subsequent public reporting. Head began his career in public accounting at KPMG where he was involved in public offerings and SEC reporting for multiple client companies. Head holds an M.B.A. degree from Indiana University and is a certified public accountant.

eGain Announces New Release of Data Adapter to Support eService Trade-in Program

New Version of eGain Data Adapter (tm) Enables Customers with Obsolete eService Systems to Safely Switch to eGain's eService Solutions, Trusted by Leading Companies

eGain Communications Corp. (Nasdaq: EGAN), a leading provider of customer service and contact center software to the Global 2000, has announced a new version of eGain Data Adapter (tm) to support the eGain SafeSwitch (tm) Program. Announced earlier this year, eGain SafeSwitch allows companies that have already invested in non-scalable or obsolete eService systems to safely switch to eGain’s proven, best-of-breed e-Service software, trusted by world-class companies to achieve and sustain customer service excellence, while trading in the un-depreciated value of their prior investment.

The new version of the eGain Data Adapter enables fast and easy access to complete customer views and associated service history, based on data from eGain and non-eGain systems.

“Staying with obsolete e-Service systems could be a fatal mistake in today's tough business environment,” said Ashu Roy, CEO of eGain. “The eGain SafeSwitch Program and the eGain Data Adapter, along with the guarantee of investment protection and no business downtime, make it a no-brainer for companies with such systems to make the switch to eGain.”

The eGain SafeSwitch Program is available to replace email management, knowledge management, live web collaboration and web self-service systems from existing and acquired vendors such as Kana, ServiceSoft, Firepond, Brightware, eShare, Delano, Divine, Melita, Webline, Cisco and others. Several enterprises, including leaders in industry sectors such as outsourcing, manufacturing, retail and government, have already made the switch to eGain’s trusted solutions.

SANTANDER IMPLEMENTS NICELOG®

NICE Systems (NASDAQ: NICE), a worldwide leader of multimedia recording solutions, applications and related professional services for business interaction management, has announced that Grupo Santander (STD: NYSE), the largest financial institution in Spain and in Latin America, with over 100,000 employees worldwide, has selected NICE Systems amongst a wide group of vendors for a multi-phase regional implementation of Total Recording and Quality Monitoring solutions in its contact centers across Latin America. The initial rollout will be in Brazil and Mexico.
Santander Cortex

Systems, Inc. “Grupo Santander joins the majority of the financial services market currently recording on NICE equipment.”

TRANSCEND SERVICES SELECTS RIGHTNOW TECHNOLOGIES

RightNow Technologies, the world’s leading provider of hosted customer service and support solutions, today announced leading medical transcription services innovator Transcend Services is using RightNow’s solution to ensure its ability to sustain fast, profitable business growth. By using RightNow, Transcend has been able to increase its remote workforce from 20 to 300 without having to hire additional help desk staff.

Instead of picking up tape recordings from medical offices and physically distributing them to transcribers as conventional services do, Transcend allows doctors to make digital recording over the phone—which are then distributed over a secure network to home-based Transcend employees around the country. Transcriptions can then be immediately delivered back to the customer via a secure Internet connection.

Because most of these employees are accustomed to working in a conventional manner rather than a digital one, Transcend has to provide substantial technical support to ensure their ongoing productivity. With the RightNow solution, transcribers can obtain answers to almost all their questions through the Web any time of the day or night.

“By eliminating any interruptions in the end-to-end transcription process from customer recording to transcript delivery, Transcend has achieved competitive superiority in terms of both speed and efficiency,” Scott Robertson, Transcend’s IT manager, said. “RightNow enables us to sustain those advantages by allowing us to answer transcribers’ questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week, regardless of how large our workforce grows.”

The RightNow knowledge base also insulates Transcend from the potential adverse business impact of any turnover in its help desk staff, since new help desk employees can use the knowledge base to quickly get up to speed on the company’s technology and procedures.

RightNow’s award-winning, patented technology ensures the completeness of Transcend’s knowledge base by allowing the company to continually add and refine knowledge base content based on the actual questions its employees ask. RightNow also makes it easy for employees to pinpoint the specific answer they need through advanced keyword search, natural language query and content-ranking techniques. In addition, it provides complete incident management features to ensure that employees’ questions are handled quickly and efficiently.

“Many companies have adapted RightNow to meet their critical internal support requirements,” Sean Forbes, vice president of marketing and business development at RightNow, said. “The fact that Transcend’s employees are geographically dispersed and are increasing so quickly only makes the case for using RightNow as its help desk platform all the more compelling.”

BEACON GLOBAL SERVICES SELECTS VIRTELA COMMUNICATIONS

Virtela Communications Inc., a leader in providing global managed internet protocol (IP) virtual private network (VPN) services, has announced that Beacon Global Services Corporation has implemented the first end-to-end voice and data call center network solution utilizing multiple IP backbones spanning the United States and India.

“I wish I could say that Virtela won a competitive bid, but I cannot. There simply wasn’t another network service provider who could deliver the voice quality and state-of-the-art call center functionality that our project specifications required at the cost-savings model we had to meet. There was no carrier that could provide us with an end-to-end connection between our New York and Hyderabad call centers, re-routing traffic, and delivering applications like CD-quality voice over IP, video conferencing, and collaboration tools all on the same private network,” said Sudhir Seth, vice president and business unit head at Beacon Global Services. “Furthermore, Virtela has provided us with continuous network monitoring software in our offices. We can see exactly what is going on across our global routes at all times. We also see exactly how we are leveraging Virtela’s multiple carrier approach. Individual carriers do not offer that level of transparency and confidence in their network availability and performance.”

For Beacon, Virtela provided extensive consultation to determine the best solution, and ultimately delivered a network infrastructure and cost structure considered to be cutting edge among call centers. Beacon expects to realize savings of 75% over projected costs for a previously planned private line solution. Virtela continues to deliver advanced monitoring, management and support services to Beacon, meeting call center stringent SLAs (service level agreements) of 99.999% reliability.
The customized solution was about giving the customer the greatest amount of flexibility while drastically decreasing their network costs. For a call center business, that’s core to the business model,” said Vab Goel, Virtela Chairman and CEO. “Beacon is the ultimate example of what IP networks should provide to businesses; IP voice, web chat, co-browsing, video conferencing, every possible form of voice, video and data transmission, all moving on private intelligent networks while delivering significant cost savings. For call centers in India in particular, where the infrastructure is still at an early stage, it is critical for them to partner with a managed network services firm that has the ability to reroute traffic on multiple carriers when difficulties arise on routes connecting India and the U.S.”

Virtela monitors and supports customer installations via two Network Operations Centers (NOCs) based in Denver, Colorado and Mumbai, India. Also, today, a separate announcement provides details about the Mumbai operations. Intrinsic to Virtela’s offering to all its customers is a carrier and vendor-neutral platform that gives customers redundancy protection only available with a multi-carrier approach. With real-time application performance monitoring, administrators can isolate and troubleshoot any performance bottlenecks quickly and decisively. Virtela’s IP Service Fabric (IPSFSM) network infrastructure exploits proprietary algorithms that route customer traffic via the best-performing path over multiple Tier-1 backbones, providing the highest availability private IP network.

“This carrier-agnostic position we hold is very important to our customers,” said Goel. “By having partnerships with over 150 carriers around the globe, we have a unique ability to ensure our customers are always on the fastest global routes. We have no incentive to keep a customer on anything but a completely optimized network at all times. We provide the HOV lane for enterprise network traffic.”

Beacon offers its customers, including Marriott, Spinnaker Resorts and Sunterra Resorts, in-bound, out-bound and web-enabled contact center services that increase their customers’ satisfaction, gather market intelligence and increase revenue. Beacon goes beyond traditional call center telephone service by offering web call back, web chat, co-browsing and custom email and fax interactions. This advanced web services approach is resulting in double-digit annual growth for Beacon and it is expected to grow the firm to over 1000 agent seats by late 2004.

Customer First Call Centers, International, has named Michael Roby Vice President of Customer Care, a new position created to help the company keep pace with the growing demand for outsourced consumer affairs services.

In his new position, Roby will be responsible for sales and marketing for the company’s call center operations as well as for its customer care software company, Systems of the Future, and TeeBop.com, an online source for hard-to-find and discontinued consumer products.

“Mike Roby is an expert in the field of customer service and quality and we’re thrilled to welcome him to our team,” said Bill Luisi, president and CEO of Customer First Call Centers. “His skill, knowledge and experience will be valuable assets as we work to create the premier outsourcing organization in the industry.”

With more than 25 years’ customer service experience, Roby most recently served as vice president of customer care for Gail Becker Associates, a Florida-based consumer affairs outsourcing firm specializing in the food, health and nutrition industries. Before joining Gail Becker Associates in 1996, Roby spent 14 years with Alamo Rent A Car where he last served as senior director of the agency’s consumer affairs and quality assurance departments.

Roby is an active member of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals (SOCAP International) where he served on the national board of directors from 1992 to 1999 and was elected SOCAP board president for 2000. He also has served as president of SOCAP’s Florida Chapter.

A founding member and past-chairman of the Broward County Quality Council, Roby also has served on the Board of Governors of the Ft. Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce. He has conducted numerous seminars and written articles and training programs about customer service and quality, and served as a consultant to a number of organizations, helping them organize and improve their customer service and quality performance.

Roby holds both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees.

Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Do Not Call List?

If you’re looking for a way to get your message out in the day of the Do Not Call list, multimedia sales tools offer a solution. CH Consulting, a sales, marketing and business development firm in the telemarketing field, has developed the ProCard and tracking companion - iQ_. The Intelligent Lead Qualifier.
CHC’s ProCard enables a company to present their sales material to prospective clients on a CD. The CDs are the size of a business card and can be custom shaped to your liking, a football, an American flag, a car or whatever! ProCard content can be derived from your current sales media, websites or you can create a new pitch to send to your lead list. The CD can be loaded with multiple-choice personal data questions to gather information on the viewer, as well as tracks where and what was done with the CD. If your presentation is viewed – iQ\(^2\) will track it. If the viewer lingers in a certain area – iQ\(^2\) will tell you. When the user responds in the affirmative to “Would you like more information?” – you’ll know that it’s OK for you to call! You’ve now received permission and the Do Not Call edict has been nullified.

CHC ProCards can be distributed through the mail, at trade shows or by using any other high volume method. The cost of production can be less than $1.00 apiece! This is miniscule compared to the price of four color printing.

So, web cards may not be new but the CHC ProCard coupled with iQ\(_2\), the Intelligent Lead Qualifier is. iQ\(_2\) is a value added subscription service clients can log-on 24 hours a day to gather and view statistics. The minute a user loads the CHC ProCard, iQ\(_2\) starts tracking and providing real time feedback. Your sales personnel will now spend their time following up on qualified leads. iQ\(_2\) Central data can also be easily exported into a subscriber’s client management system, such as Goldmine. iQ\(_2\) data will help identify customer and prospect trends and level of interest in your products.

Voila! Say goodbye to the DNC!

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**ESSAY**

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow - Employee Absence & The Evaporating Workforce by sharon kaleta and edward l. anderson, MD

Productivity is up, the economy is growing and the job market appears to be getting better. But does that mean happy days are here again for American workers and companies? Not unless they have a present and committed workforce, the very foundation of a growing and successful business. Recent findings about incidental employee absence paint a hazardous picture for companies struggling to find their footing in this fledgling recovery. A survey conducted among human resource and disability/absence managers by the Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) in July points to an alarmingly high level of incidental or “claimless” employee absence—those unscheduled instances when an employee is away from work for one to five days. While some incidental absences may be justified, a large number are of the three-day weekend and “mental health day” variety. Stressed by onerous work conditions, dissatisfied employees opt out of work situations that might not have kept them home in happier times. “My boss doesn’t value my ideas, my schedule at work is too rigid, I’m not treated fairly…. I’ll take a day or two of sick leave. I deserve it!” Immensely disruptive and expensive to employers, these short, unscheduled absences wreak havoc on work schedules, increase workload for the employees who do show up and hamstring productivity. By the time a company knows about the absence, the employee is often back at work. Incidental absences like these can account for as much as 80% of absence events and 33% of all lost workdays. Consider a light manufacturer with 16,000 employees, each of whom costs their employer $50,000 per year including benefits, etc. Incidental absence inflicts $16 million per year in direct costs. Indeed earlier this year, a major airline revealed that unscheduled employee absence was costing it $1 million per day. Perhaps most alarming is that American employers have no idea of the extent of the absence problem. The DMEC survey revealed, a majority of employers do not know the costs of incidental absence, barely half have implemented a systematic approach to track it, and only 16% have the necessary tools to reduce it. What this and other recent surveys reveal is a high level of “employee withdrawal”, a negative orientation in how a person thinks, feels and behaves toward work. Due to the difficult labor market, employees are working longer and harder than ever. This is resulting in higher apparent output, but it is also producing increasingly stressed employees who turn to a day off here and there to get away from an ever-larger workload. Each time they stay home they pile even more work, and stress, onto the shoulders of their co-workers who report to work. Absence begets more absence. The ties that bind employee to company weaken. When the job market finally improves, these workers will take their talent and skill and jump to new employers. Unchecked, the same factors that drive absence will drive stressed workers to “permanently withdraw” in the form of voluntary turnover. The bad news is that incidental absence is a very real threat to many employers. The good news is that it can be reduced, in turn preventing the talent flight.
that could undermine profitability—and even the nascent economic recovery. Employers should do the following to reduce employee absence: * Understand the problem. A solution can only be devised if management knows the extent of the problem. To do that companies need to collect and collate absence related data in a form they can readily interpret and use. * Identify root causes. With a clear picture of the problem in hand, figure out what factors are driving workers away from the workplace. Incidental absence is not an individual problem. It has systemic, organizational causes. Management must understand the processes and procedures that are poisoning the workplace and driving up absence across the board. * Intervene. Implementing even basic workplace changes can dramatically reduce incidental absence and its costs. Companies that make these changes realize immediate gains in efficiency and productivity. The U.S. economy seems to be improving. That means employees have more options. Smart companies can and should make changes now not only to reduce the near term losses incidental absence can inflict but also to hold onto the huge investment they have made in talented employees. Sharon Kaleta is CEO of the Disability Management Employer Coalition. Edward L. Anderson is President of Nucleus Solutions.

**CASE STUDY**

The Wendover-Global Insight IT Spending Index for Q3 2003 was up over 10% relative to last quarter’s Index, reinforcing indications that declines in net new IT spending have bottomed out. However, the Index still remains slightly below Q3 2002 Index levels, suggesting an overall flat market that requires a deeper look into individual categories to detect winners and losers. A closer inspection reveals why the overall Index is flat: spending increases in some industries and applications are offset by declines in others. Is CRM making a comeback? The survey index data shown in Figure 1 seems to indicate a resurgence in CRM spending. The index value is nearly triple excess of 10% over Q3 2002.

* The brightest star appears to be CRM as the index value exceeded or fell below those year’s level, or whether they exceeded or fell below those ranges. Of the 23 products/applications tracked in the survey, half showed a marked decline over last year’s spending levels. Only 7 categories showed increases in excess of 10% over Q3 2002. The brightest star appears to be CRM as the index value shows a continuing trend upward from last year. (See Chart “CRM”).

Data Warehousing and Management have ticked up as well, by 15% year-over-year. (See Chart “Data Warehousing and Management”). The index for spending on consulting services rose by 28% over last year. Other substantial annual increases are seen in Maintenance and Facilities Software (31%), Manufacturing Software (24%), and Internet/Intranet Services (15%). * Declines in personnel software and services, purchasing software and training software and services appear to be reflective of economic conditions. However the path of annual spending indicated by major components such as Network Equipment (-52%) and Network Services (-34%) could be symptomatic of a structural change in business IT purchases. In addition to distributing the IT Spending Index to the public at no cost, Wendover Corporation provides research clients with more segmented analysis from the same database. Global Insight provides its clients with broader market analysis that incorporates the IT Spending data along with other business intelligence and market projections. Note: An Index analysis, FAQs about the survey methodology and the Index, and other information are available at: http://www.itforecast.com/ and http://www.globalinsight.com/itindex
Good customer service is universal and transcends across industries. Whether your customer calls a bank or airline they expect consistent service across industries. Is your customer service representative listening to customers and responding to their needs effectively? Validate your customer satisfaction position improve it!

DALBAR supports customer service operations in many ways from reducing costs and increasing customer satisfaction to making the most of sales opportunities. For over 10 years DALBAR has played a key role supporting inbound and outbound call centers in achieving these objectives.

Many call centers use a variety of software tools to maximize knowledge management and service customers efficiently. DALBAR ensures agents use call center tools effectively by measuring the behavior between the customer service agent and customer, including phone, email, mail, and web interactions. We evaluate these touch points using tested criteria to help companies reduce costs and increase customer satisfaction while gaining efficiencies from best practices. Our services are offered across all industries and are tailored to fit your firm’s business priorities.

**Our products and services enable you to:**

- Shorten call lengths
- Decrease call volume
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Maximize sales opportunities
- Promote web usage
- Motivate employees
- Gather intelligence and benchmark
- Improve Help Desk interaction
- Measure agent performance
- Monitor call quality
- Develop training solutions
- Improve training solutions
- Manage the workforce better
- Transition operations offshore or to an outsource facility

Tell us which of the areas above are priorities for your customer service center by visiting

www.dalbarinc.com/ccp.htm

Ask us about our complimentary white paper,

*Best Practices Employed by Industry Service Leaders in Creating a Customer Focused Strategy.*

**Call Center Leadership Seminars**

DALBAR offers call center leadership seminars that are ideal for call center supervisors, managers, team leaders, call coaches, and trainers. You’ll learn directly from DALBAR’s experts and peers across industries how to:

- Implement effective incentive programs
- Introduce best practices for motivating customer service representatives
- Coach representatives to shorten call lengths and achieve greater customer satisfaction
- Improve current training programs and more

**Contact DALBAR to receive an enrollment package and form for the upcoming seminar in historic Boston on January 15-16, 2004.**
Gartner Strategic Analysis Report Finds GMT Planet Highest in User Satisfaction

(ATLANTA, Georgia) November 7, 2003 — Gartner, Inc.'s newest research report on workforce management in contact centers includes the finding that GMT Planet users reported the highest satisfaction score of all products included in the report. “MarketScope: Workforce Management Software for the Contact Center” included over a dozen vendors such as Aspect, Blue Pumpkin and IEX as well as many smaller ones. In addition to reporting the highest satisfaction score of any product, the customers surveyed by Gartner found GMT above average in every category surveyed.

John Ellis, GMT’s director of customer support operations, commented, “We are pleased that the Gartner report validated the success of our efforts to make sure that one hundred percent of our customers receive the very best service during and after the sale. We know that it takes more than just great product to ensure a successful workforce management solution.”

GMT Planet has received many awards for “Product of the Year” and “Best of Show” at trade shows and in publications, both in the United States and in Europe. Most recently, GMT Planet was honored as product of the year for the third consecutive year by Customer Interaction Solutions.

According to Mike Podrazilnsky, CTO, “We engineered GMT Planet to satisfy large and small contact centers, single-site and multiple-site, skills-based and non-skill-based. We’re proud that it shows, and that we have the reputation for customer satisfaction that we have both in the contact center space and throughout the enterprise.”

About Gartner

Founded in 1979, Gartner (www.gartner.com) is headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut and has over 3,800 associates, including approximately 1,000 research analysts and consultants, in more than 75 locations worldwide. GMT Corp has no affiliation with Gartner. Contact centers interested in purchasing a copy of this report should contact Gartner at 203 964 0096 in the United States, +44 1784 431611 in Europe, or +61 2 9459 4600 in Asia/Pacific.

About GMT

GMT Corp (www.gmt.com)

Company Profile

TouchStar Software provides the easiest to use and most reasonably priced predictive dialing solution available, along with robust inbound ACD features found in most high-end phone systems.

TouchStar reduces training time and helps agents become productive faster. TouchStar provides supervisors with real-time reporting and graphical comparisons of agent and campaign productivity. TouchStar even notifies your supervisors of performance problems that need to be managed immediately. TouchStar puts the management tools supervisors need at their fingertips such as agent monitoring, live agent coaching, text (chat) messaging, and digital call recording.

TouchStar is easily used for remote agents working from home in the same city, a different state or even in another country.

Equally important to an excellent product, is TouchStar’s dedication to providing exceptional customer support.

TouchStar Software - Not Your Predictable Predictive Dialer!

Contact us now to find out more. 866-338-0678 www.touchstarsoftware.com