

Call Center Times

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The Real Case for the Home-Based Agent Model

By Jim Ball

In recent years, there has been a rapidly-increasing level of interest in the use of agents working from home as an alternative to the traditional facilities-based call center approach. Many in the call center industry focus on the cost-savings aspect of the home-based contact center model, with a particular focus on the use of home-based agents as an alternative to sending calls offshore, when in fact the true value proposition offered by the use of home-based agents is much different – and much more appealing – than that.

Quality Agents

While the benefits include flexibility, security, control and redundancy, the most important advantage of using agents working from their homes, by far, is **higher quality agents**. The reason the home-based agent model truly can deliver on the promise of providing higher quality agents is straightforward: the larger the pool of candidates from which a company hires its agents, the more selective it can be in the quality of those agents.

While those in a physical call center are restricted to hiring employees within a reasonable commute, a home-based agent model that provides regional, national, or even international access to agents means a virtually unlimited candidate pool. Instead of desperately trying to keep seats filled, companies employing home-

based agents have the luxury of hiring only the very best of those applying for positions.

Having such a large reach does not automatically yield a high-quality workforce, however. It is important that the company has solid processes designed to identify those characteristics of candidates that will lead to outstanding performance. Once hired, those agents expect a professional and efficient operation, with appropriate training, communications and support. The company that can meet all of those expectations will be rewarded with an agent workforce that is extremely difficult to replicate in an affordable manner at scale with a traditional call center model.

Pricing

The presumption that the use of home-based agents is a viable “alternative” to sending calls offshore seems to be predicated on an expectation that the cost savings resulting from not needing a physical workplace is comparable to the savings that result from the much lower labor rates in offshore markets. Given the fact that the single largest expense in any call-handling model is agent labor, and that the labor rates in the most common offshore locations are a fraction of that in domestic labor markets, it is impossible for a home-based agent model to compete with offshore models based solely on cost per agent hour (or minute, or

call). That does not mean that the home-based agent model is without significant cost benefits, however.

In a traditional model, it generally is necessary to schedule agents for a minimum of 3-4 hours at a time to make it worthwhile for the agent to commute to the call center. With this scheduling limitation it can be very difficult for a traditional call center to match its workforce with the incoming call volumes in a manner that yields high agent utilization without compromising acceptable service levels. In order to maintain acceptable service levels, it generally is necessary to operate at lower-than-desired agent utilizations during certain periods of the day.

In contrast, a home-based agent model affords a company the ability to schedule its agents in much smaller time increments; often with multiple schedules in a given day. This ability to more closely match agent labor to forecasted incoming call volume can yield a significant cost savings. Although the unit cost

per hour (or minute) may be comparable to a traditional center, the number of units required to get the job done can be much lower.

One cost impact that often is overlooked is the cost per dollar of revenue generated in an average transaction. Many businesses consider the call center function to be a pure cost component when, in fact, it may be possible to have this function not only pay for itself, but actually become a profit center. Once again, the key to that success lies in the quality of the agents. If the nature of the calls is customer service, then an agent's ability to perform at a higher level can translate into higher customer retention rates, higher return purchase levels and superior word-of-mouth support, not to mention the possibility of real-time up-sells and cross-sells.

If the nature of the calls is sales, agents who have been selected because they are friendlier, smarter and the best possible representative for the product or service being sold will produce higher close ratios and higher average order sizes. The higher



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levels of agent satisfaction resulting from the convenience of working from home also result in longer average tenures, which further translate into increased levels of product knowledge and experience.

So, why isn't everyone doing it?

Given the compelling value proposition, people often ask why more companies haven't made the move to home-based agents. For one thing, establishing a home-based business model is difficult. Making the assumption that it is possible to extend traditional operational models out to the home is a big mistake. While it may work for a few agents, the chaos that would result from a more aggressive initiative without a major shift in operational philosophy would be disastrous.

Also, many companies have been reluctant to move to a home-based agent model due to the enormous amount of existing investment in traditional call center infrastructure. Certainly, the bricks and mortar aspects of that investment are completely unusable in a home-based agent model. Companies also find that much of their technology, business process and human resource investment are of little or no value in this model, as well.

To date, the combination of these factors has limited the model's large-scale adoption in existing operations. Companies looking to launch new or expanded operations, however, as well as a growing number of those with existing traditional centers are beginning to reconsider their options as they discover the real value proposition of the home-based agent model.

Jim Ball is co-founder and chief architect of Alpine Access (www.alpineaccess.com). He can be reached at 303-279-0585.



TRENDS

Say What? Demystifying Speech in the Contact Center

By Brian Garr, program director and segment manager, Contact Center Solutions, IBM Software Group

Consider this: humans, despite all the visual and auditory cues we get from looking at a speaker, still have a word error rate of about 3%-5%. So for an un-seeing, un-hearing, un-thinking computer to understand speech, the task is monumental. It is no wonder then that companies, while anxious to reap the benefits of speech in areas such as the contact center, have been unsure how to effectively integrate it in their operations.

Today, we see the next step in the evolution of speech. The call center is now the contact center. This is not just a semantic difference. The *call center* had tied primarily to telephony and related applications, and, more importantly, is a cost center. The *contact center* is a critical element of businesses processes, and has the potential to be a profit center. It is the doorway through which companies get service when they need it and through the channel they choose to use, whether it is Web, phone, device or even a retail store kiosk. The speech channel has become an integrated

channel to access business processes that help us create value, meet threats and opportunities and reduce costs. To leverage speech and reach new potentials, you have to embrace the transformation of the call center into the contact center.

Making Sense of Your Options

Speech applications can be broken down into two general areas. Many companies demand directed dialog applications in industries such as Financial Services and Banking, where customers want to obtain their bank balance, locate a nearby ATM or transfer funds. The Financial sector has always been the leader in the use of speech technologies, and is today also leading the way in developing Service Oriented Architectures (SOAs), which enable rapid re-use of business processes across the business, including the contact center. Other industries with strong demand for these kinds of inquiry/transaction interactions include Insurance, Telecommunications, Utilities, Government, Travel and Consumer Packaged Goods.

The second most common application in the market now is intelligent call routing using natural language understanding. Rather than listening to a litany of possible menu routes, the caller hears "How may I help you?" and the response utterance is evaluated based on the possible set of allowable actions and routed appropriately. This kind of application cuts down on the amount of different phone numbers required for different functions, and leads to greater customer retention and satisfaction as they are directed immediately to where they need to go. A call

routing application may, for example, connect you to a loan specialist or send you to a directed dialog system for getting your loan balance.

Choosing the Technology Best for Your Company

Perhaps the biggest mistake companies make when they reach the decision-making stage and choose a speech technology is looking at ASR and TTS as niche technologies, rather than looking at ASR and TTS as one of several channel enablement technologies that fit into a broader business strategy. They should be asking, "how does this technology fit into my entire business process architecture? Is there a horizontal commonality among the piece parts that make up the contact center middleware?" Based on industry examples, open standards reduce costs and protect companies' investments. So contact center managers will want to make sure that they leverage the same tooling and IDE as the rest of the company, that they use the same infrastructure for Web and speech deployments, and that everything ties back to the enterprise data that is already available, rather than creating new copies of existing data.

Utilizing SOA to Drive Profit Center Capabilities

As we all know, today's contact centers have the capability to not only support superior service but drive revenue opportunities to impact the bottom line. Open standards and SOAs allow companies to leverage these platforms and technologies in a flexible environment to improve the effectiveness of contact center



operations and their integration into broader business processes. The keys to retaining customers, reducing costs, and creating new cross-sell opportunities and new revenue streams lies in the ability of the contact center to quickly make available self-services through multiple channels. Let's take a hypothetical banking case to illustrate. As part of my SOA at Bank XYZ I have created, or, in some cases, contracted for, the following standardized components that I can call as needed:

Customer Authentication

Account Balance

Loan Application

Risk Management

Credit Check

Credit Processing

Loan Fulfillment

All of these services can stand on their own, but when they are easily accessible through open standards they become powerful tools for meeting contact center goals. So let's go through the steps of our hypothetical scenario and see how we take advantage of these services.

One day I am walking through downtown Austin and I see a piece of art that would be perfect in my house. It is expensive and I'm not sure I have enough credit left on my credit card to make the purchase. So I use my cell phone to call my bank. Here is the dialog that ensues:

Bank speech enabled self service speech system: How can I help you?

Me: What is the balance on my credit card account?

Authentication service

Bank: What is your home phone number?

Me: 561-555-1212

Bank: What are the last four digits of your social security number?

Me: 1234

Authentication service responds with a positive ID check Account Balance service responds with the credit card balance

Bank: The balance available on your credit card is \$372.

Me: I would like to request an increase in my available balance.

Loan

Application service

Bank: How much additional credit would you like to apply for?

Me: Two thousand dollars

Credit Check Service (which is outsourced off premises) Risk Management Service (rules based service decides I am worth the risk) Credit Processing Service (outsourced to Visa) Loan

Fulfillment Service Bank: Your application has been approved.

Your new available balance is \$2,372

Those transactions could have occurred over the web, over a PDA device, or over the phone, because they all use the same available services, both internal and external. Through the use of these SOA components, Bank XYZ retained me as a customer, satisfied my need for information, and created new revenue for the bank.

Continuing the Evolution of Speech and Your Business

While advances continue in the application of speech technology in the contact center as seen through SOAs, we are just now beginning to see how natural language self service can create great benefits for companies across all industries. These applications are pleasant to deal with, and they enhance the

customer experience, as well as create an on demand environment for customer service. Their value will expand as we develop new tools to reduce the time to market for advanced natural language applications.

We have also seen great advances in the past five years in the quality of text-to-speech (TTS), and we will continue to see that technology become more natural and easy to listen to, so I predict we will see more applications that use text-to-speech rather than recorded prompts. Finally, one area that is virtually untapped is speaker independent transcription over the phone, which would allow you to dictate an e-mail or add notes to your customer database using your phone. In fact, we have a project in IBM Research which is working to make this a reality in the next five years.

About Brian Garr

Brian Garr is Program Director and Segment Manager for Contact Center Solutions in the Software Group of IBM. He has been with IBM for six years, and is an evangelist and speaker worldwide on machine translation, text to speech and speech recognition. Prior to joining IBM, Garr was a CTO and VP of two startup technology companies. He has a BA degree from Washington & Lee University.

Garr received the Smithsonian Institute's "Heroes of Technology" designation in 1998 for his work in machine translation.



CASE STUDY

MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTION PROVIDER ELIMINATES DOWNTIME USING ENVOX CT ADE

The Challenge:

EMDAT's comprehensive suite of web-based applications provides medical transcription services organizations (MTSOs) and healthcare facilities with the ability to efficiently manage the entire dictation and transcription process. Clinicians can record notes over the phone using InTouch® or a hand-held digital recorder connected to a computer. The dictations are then uploaded to one of EMDAT's InCommand® servers where they are inventoried and queued for transcription. Transcriptionists use the InScribe® application to automatically download the dictation and transcribe the reports. Once the transcription is completed, it is immediately available on-line for viewing, editing, printing and electronic signature through the use of the InQuery® application. Throughout the process, MTSOs and healthcare facilities are able to access the file and monitor progress in the dictation process real-time.

Though their dictation process was flawless, EMDAT was facing a one serious problem with their solution delivery - their telephony system was unreliable. As a result, it was having a serious affect on their customer satisfaction, and their bottom line - costing them almost \$8 per minute in lost revenue. The company needed greater reliability and stability out of its telephony systems.

The Solution:



After evaluating their options, the company's new version of their phone-based InTouch service was developed and deployed on Envox CT ADE. EMDAT relied on Envox CT ADE's rapid development capabilities to quickly create the solution. Once deployed, the Envox CT ADE-based approach provided EMDAT with the stability they required to efficiently manage this large-scale, mission-critical solution. Leveraging Envox CT ADE's capability to work directly with the Intel Dialogic APIs, EMDAT is now able to effectively control its telephony boards ensuring that they are up and running.

Based on their success using Envox CT ADE to develop InTouch, the EMDAT development team used Envox CT ADE to create, deploy and manage the fax capabilities of their process, which enables automatic delivery of transcribed dictations through that medium.

The Results:
Today, InTouch relies on Envox CT ADE to take over 4,000 dictations per day and the company has virtually eliminated downtime.

"With Envox CT ADE, we can ensure 100% service availability. Before we took this step, we used to get service calls daily. Now, we very rarely get a service related call, said Kevin Saliga, vice president of software development at EMDAT. "We will continue to rely on Envox Worldwide to provide us with the platforms and tools we need to confidently develop the solutions that our customers demand."

EMDAT is now free to focus technical resources on product development and on providing the most comprehensive transcription management solution available. The company was one of the first to see the value of providing a total solution in a fragmented market of diction equipment, document management and transcription service vendors. Today, most of the transcription service providers have adopted the EMDAT solution as the framework for their business. This provides a tremendous benefit for healthcare providers; companies can move from one translation provider to another without changing underlying business processes, retraining clinicians or

reinvesting in hardware or infrastructure.

EMDAT's complete suite of integrated dictation and transcription software solutions can be used through the company's ASP model or purchased and housed locally. For additional information, or to locate one of EMDAT's transcription partners, contact the company at 866-GO-EMDAT or visit www.emdat.com.

Envox CT Application Development Environment
The Envox CT Application Development Environment (Envox CT ADE™) is a set of program building blocks that are easier to use — and quicker to learn — than conventional hardware interfaces. Envox CT ADE abstracts the Intel Dialogic hardware and software interfaces, as well as third-party speech products, into a rapid application development (RAD) platform for voice, fax, conference, and speech-enabled solutions. Using Envox CT ADE to manage the telephony devices and speech engines, you can focus on your unique business requirements.

The power and ease of Envox CT ADE are available in two forms: Application Development Language (ADL) – a procedural language, with optional graphical interface, incorporating many telephony application building blocks
Application Development ActiveX® Objects (ADX) – a library of methods with a COM interface that can be incorporated into Windows® visual development languages like C++, Visual Basic®, Delphi®, as well as Microsoft.NET languages C# and VB.NET

Envox Worldwide is a leading global provider of voice solutions. The company's software and related services dramatically reduce the time, cost, and complexity of creating voice solutions. These products and services enable enterprise customers and service providers to significantly reduce operating costs, improve customer satisfaction and retention, and generate new revenue streams. Headquartered in Boston, Envox's products and services are available through a network of global channel partners. For more information, please visit



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TIPS

Off-shore Outsourcing: Prepare Before You Dive In

For many in today's business environment, off-shore outsourcing seems to be a given. Recognizing it as a powerful business tool for maximizing profitability and creating opportunities for continued growth, they're ready to take the plunge. Perhaps you're one of them. Before you do, there are some important things you need to consider. Moving an operation off-shore can quickly become quite overwhelming. Here's some information that will help you keep your head above water.

It's fairly standard practice these days to start out any new effort by educating yourself through the Internet. So, you might approach the idea of taking one of your operations off-shore by doing a search, hoping to find some answers that point you in the right direction. If you do, you'll most likely come across a list of consulting firms that offer to place you with a call center agency in the country you've selected for outsourcing. These consultancies usually maintain some type of relationship with a number of agencies in the most popular outsourcing destinations. But wait, what exactly is the call center agency's role in this to

begin with? And, let's get back to that country you are considering. How can you be certain it's the best location for your particular off-shore operation? There's a lot more you need to know and understand – a lot more expert information to develop – before you can take that first step outside of the country. For instance, let's start with a fundamental yet critical question. Is outsourcing your operation off-shore a solid business decision for your organization in the first place?

Taking all or a part of your operation off-shore is a major business decision. You've got to do your homework. It will help to have someone in your corner who has the track record and expertise to say, "Been there, done that – and our organization has the savvy and the connections to help *you* to get there with a minimum amount of risk." Find a consultant with credentials like these; one that can take you intelligently through the entire process, and you'll be in a position to proceed with an elevated degree of confidence and success.

The Off-Shoring Process

Before you go forward, it's essential to have an overview of all that's involved in the decision to take an operation off-shore.

The process includes:

Cost/Benefit Analysis – This brings us back to that all important, fundamental question. Is outsourcing the operation off-shore the best choice? A detailed, cost/benefit analysis will give you the information you need to

answer that question. It will also alert you to issues you need to consider, as well as arm you with the facts when you have to sell your decision to stakeholders.

Selection of Vendor – If the cost/benefit analysis supports a decision to off-shore, the next step is choosing one or more qualified vendor(s).

- Developing the RFP for an outsourcing vendor requires specific knowledge of outsourcing, and off-shoring in particular. It should include:

Performance Criteria – stated in terms that allow tracking and measurement

Performance Assessment – a functional tool to assure the vendor is meeting expectations

Management Outline – defining management requirements for a business relationship between you and the vendor

- Evaluation and selection of a vendor based on the response to the RFP can be a science in itself. Starting with a well-written RFP is crucial. Taking the information provided in the response and evaluating it in the context of the off-shore environment requires real expertise. The success, or failure, of your off-shoring operation might well rest on how well you are able to interpret the information you receive. And, on your ability to understand the impact of that information on your operation overall.

Site Selection

- Determining the best location for the particular operation to be off-

shored begins another process requiring detailed understanding of variables such as technical capabilities, and the availability and qualification of the labor pool.

Transition Requirements/Planning

- Finally making it all happen requires an accurate roadmap, complete with specific milestones marking all the many elements critical to successfully moving or starting a business off-shore.

Conclusion

There are many challenges to face should you decide to outsource off-shore. A popular slogan of marketers reads: The question no longer is, "Can I really afford to outsource off-shore?" but "Can I afford NOT to!" Maybe the better question is: "Can I really afford to outsource off-shore without beginning with a detailed cost/benefit analysis and moving step-by step through the process with a proven, qualified consultant?" If you're going to venture into those swirling off-shore waters, it makes sense to be well coached and prepared.

About the Author

Alton Martin is the CEO and a Co-founder of COPC. His work with leading edge firms such as Microsoft, American Express, Dell, EDS, and General Motors, has raised the bar for achieving Contact Center Excellence. Alton's commitment to performance improvement strategies is integral to the COPC operational improvement methodology and the COPC-2000® Standard, that



dramatically impacts customer touch transactions.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Finding Coherence in Multi-switch Environments

By Katrin Burton, Business Development Manager, Envoy Worldwide

Call Center integration is an issue that is central to many of today's corporations. Whether the necessary integration is the result of acquisition or merger of organizations, the growth of a call center, or other corporate happening, the integration benefits are widely known: more efficient usage of agent skills, improved load balancing, the ability to handle more calls per agent, a better melding of technical resources, and lower customer wait times. With huge investments in switches, data and call center business applications, a manager facing one of these situations needs to find unifying solutions that can help harmonize disparate systems as quickly as possible, without any loss of customer service or time routing calls.

Call center integration may seem a daunting task but it can be done. An important technical trend to leverage is the migration to call processing middleware. Simply put, this represents a transition from direct phone-to-switch DTMF-based communications to a centralized, server-based approach for simultaneous call and data routing. This replaces the linear, multi-switch model with a single intelligent center for routing requests and coordinating agent response.

Call processing solutions accelerate communication across all call center products including switches, ACDs, agent screen pop applications, CRM software and more. Additionally, these solutions offer important mobility (remote agents), speed and resource usage (load balancing across sites) benefits. This scenario eliminates the need to hardwire a one to one (PC to phone) agent desktop and instead enables the client-server model for the simultaneous voice and data routing needed for virtual call center solutions. Sending data packets over IP is significantly faster than DTMF switching, resulting in decreased hold times as the customer is being transferred to an agent. Additionally, this configuration has proven to be more cost-effective in call centers with over 20 agents.

Within some switching and network environments, there can be a drawback to call processing, because most switches and station sets evolved in isolation in

each vendor's development lab and therefore some boutique features are created within the set itself or within the messaging set between the set and switch may have been lost as new offerings focus on common feature integrations across all products. In many cases, System Integrators (SIs) must even custom create functionality in these new environments that was previously available.

Companies in every industry are adopting the call processing middleware approach to unify and improve their call center operations thereby increasing productivity, enhancing service options and reducing the cost per call. Call processing software products, such as Envoy CT Connect[®], speed up the development and deployment of these solutions by providing an integration to all common PBX/ACDs, including emerging IP PBXs, and provide a single integration point for the software developer or SI. Developers of all types of call center software can utilize call processing software, including call recording and quality monitoring products, workforce management applications, CRM software, IVR solutions, intelligent workstation and agent screen pop applications. Call processing solutions give call center managers greater flexibility to utilize their existing hardware and software and to upgrade pieces as needed to create a best-of-breed solution that is tailored to their needs. Additionally, call processing software like Envoy CT Connect can ensure a seamless migration to truly networked multi-

site call centers and new solutions, including IP-based architectures, in the future.

A call control approach with Envoy CT Connect significantly reduces the time, cost and complexity of improving any piece of the call center operation. Without it, call center application vendors and managers would require a dedicated engineering staff just to keep up with one switch vendor's switching and instrument products, applications and interfaces as they evolve, never mind the entire group.

When beginning a call center integration project, managers must first determine how best to route calls in order to minimize hold time, maximize agent availability and ensure the best skills match. Enhancing call handling procedures and agent tools can yield important productivity and satisfaction results. For example, when Hilton Hotels acquired rival Promus Hotel Corporation, the company quadrupled the number of hotels under management. This put significant pressure on the company's call center operations which were already handling over 31 million calls annually. Although they acquired additional call centers, the switching systems in the various call centers utilized different switches and PBXs, and the reservations systems were so incompatible that agents could not access other locations if they were unable to accommodate the caller's first choice. MicroAutomation, a leading provider of contact center solutions based in Manassas,



Virginia, was asked by Hilton to design a unified solution that would improve productivity. By adding this new solution, Hilton expected their agents would be able to handle the rising call volume without draining resources or budget.

MicroAutomation concentrated on designing advanced agent desktop and call automation solutions that would increase productivity. With DNIS information from the switch, agents receive a screen pop with reservation information for the caller's desired property. MicroAutomation worked to enhance the standard screen pop functionality with the ability to access Hilton's two reservation systems enabling the cross promotion of alternate Hilton properties. Further, MicroAutomation used interactive voice response (IVR) to automate

more of the call, including backend confirmations. This reduced overall call length and allowed agents to handle even more transactions, further lowering the cost per call. MicroAutomation relied on Envoy CT Connect to communicate with the various switches and pop the appropriate information to the agents.

In this case, it was more cost-effective for Hilton to maintain independent call center switching equipment in their call centers and focus resources on revamping agent tools, enhancing cross-selling opportunities and automating calls. Hilton estimates that the improvements resulting from the MicroAutomation solution added more than twenty hours per day of additional customer contact at each of its call centers.

How do you start a project like this? Amcom Software of Minneapolis, MN specializes in helping mission-critical companies unify existing telephone, paging and computer information systems to create comprehensive call center solutions that cut operating costs and improve productivity by providing live and automated operator services, they recommend that call center managers start by creating a Network Design Document that provides an exact map of how calls are to be answered and routed in all possible scenarios. The document defines the master or host switch(es) vs. slave or remote switches and how calls will be routed between them for different call types, and includes a redundancy plan.

After completing the Network Design Document, call center managers can focus on providing

agents with the tools they need to best serve customers. Here, Amcom recommends creating a functional specification for each individual call type. This requires an in-depth understanding of how each call comes in, along with the full range of possible requests and the information and services needed to meet that caller's needs. The end result is a step-by-step call flow for each call type including a complete definition of agent screens, the data resources needed to populate them, and the call control functions required to provide exceptional service.

Amcom successfully used this approach in a recent federal government project. They were contracted to help eliminate the hefty fees the customer was paying to maintain and modify their legacy call center equipment. After reviewing the government's network requirements, Amcom



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(Scott Shelton – Ritecity, Director of Business Development)

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designed a mission critical call control solution that unified their existing 10+ switches and totally redundant, multi-site contact center configuration. The company implemented a networked call control solution featuring Envoy CT Connect to meet and exceed the customer's requirements and ensure cost-effective flexibility moving forward.

Before beginning any switch integration project, Amcom suggests that the call center manager ensures that all features of the PBX, especially networking related capabilities, have been implemented. Many times, switches are not configured with their full feature set because

some of the capabilities were not required when the switch was initially installed. Taking this step will help avoid unexpected problems as the project proceeds and help ensure against the frustration, *"I know my switch supports this, why doesn't it work."*

Virtual-Agent Services (www.vagent.com), a privately held company headquartered in Schaumburg, IL, is a unique provider of contact center solutions for today's demanding customer care industry. Servicing a wide range of industries including roadside assistance, catalog sales, travel and hospitality, and utility services,

VAS provides a variety of support options that include inbound sales and customer service, customer account maintenance, credit management, and travel reservations. VAS' efforts have earned the company numerous accolades, including recognition from both Entrepreneur and Inc. magazines and a number of prestigious awards.

VAS has elevated the expectations of contact center customers and their clients by focusing on service quality as well as price. By pioneering a new ACD application that allows smaller contact centers to access

a single central telephone connection, VAS has brought work to areas with smaller but more highly skilled groups of workers. The result is better service, higher retention of experienced agents, increased customer satisfaction, and demand by companies requiring qualified agents capable of handling complex inbound service calls and queries.

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News

IEX and Keynomics Announce Partnership for Web-Based Agent Development

SAN FRANCISCO & RICHARDSON, TEXAS: IEX Corporation, a Tekelec company (Nasdaq: TKLC), and Keynomics LLC, announced a strategic alliance. Through this alliance, IEX will offer its customers Talk, Type, Listen, a contact center agent productivity training program that enhances agent computer keyboarding and transcription skills. The offering is developed by Keynomics and is provided as a Web-based hosted program accessed via the WebStation Plus module available with the IEX TotalView Workforce Management system. The training is designed to deliver permanent improvements in contact center productivity, quality and ergonomics in terms of how an



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agent interfaces simultaneously with the caller and the agent's computer.

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IEX and Symmetrics Sign Reseller Agreement for Workforce Management Reporting

Relationship to Help Contact Centers Create Mission-Critical Custom Reports

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA & RICHARDSON, TEXAS (August 30, 2005): IEX Corporation, a Tekelec company (NASDAQ: TKLC) and leading provider of workforce management and optimization technology announced a strategic partnership with Symmetrics Business Intelligence Solutions Inc. Under the agreement, IEX will resell Symmetrics custom reporting services.

The offering extends the reporting and analysis capabilities of the IEX TotalView® Workforce Management system. As an option to using predefined reports, customers can create workforce management reports tailored to their center's unique needs.

"The creation of customized reporting and analysis is a common need for a number of contact centers. The combination of TotalView's robust set of standard reports combined with Symmetrics' expertise in specialized reporting will provide a useful service to many of our customers," said IEX President

Debbie May.

■

EDIFY AND THE COLLEGE OF CALL CENTER EXCELLENCE ADDRESS SPEECH AND CUSTOMER SERVICE BEST PRACTICES AND SOLUTIONS

SANTA CLARA, Calif., Edify® Corp. a leading global supplier of voice and speech solutions, announced that it has partnered with Dr. Jon Anton, Dean of The Call Center Excellence, to host a free webcast series that will discuss the results of a comprehensive Purdue University call center study on IVR usage. The study's author, leading call center benchmarking expert Dr. Jon Anton, will talk about the study's findings which include the cost of poor customer service, best practices of speech-enabled IVR and describe how to increase customers' satisfaction. Participants of the webcast series will receive a certification on Caller Satisfaction Management Training from The College of Call Center Excellence.

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Virtual-Agent Services Establishes 12th North American Contact Center

SCHAUMBURG, IL – Virtual-Agent Services (VAS), a high quality provider of contact center solutions, announced that it has established its twelfth customer care location in the Village of Rogersville, New Brunswick, Canada. VAS currently provides inbound services to a number of

high profile clients including CVS Pharmacy, CenterPoint Energy Minnesota Gas, Mobil Travel Guide, TravelCLICK, Passkey International, and Morgans Hotel Group.

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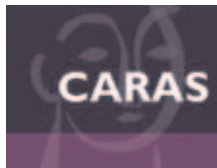
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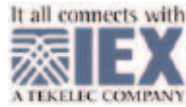
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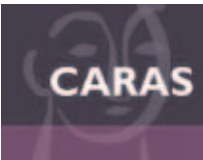
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