

Call Center Times

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Ready, Set, Close - Preparing Your Phone Reps for Selling Success

by Penny Reynolds, Senior Partner,
The Call Center School

In a catalog call center we visited recently, the phone reps were being asked to up-sell one of the company's new products at the end of the order-taking process. Rachel, one of the newest reps in the center, was regularly offering the product on every single call, and enjoying a pretty good conversion rate. Alex, a more seasoned employee who was actually more skilled than Rachel, did not offer the product on a single call we observed. And Sarah, another fairly new employee made some attempts but without much success.

What's wrong with this picture? Is it a matter of having the wrong people in the job? Not enough training? Insufficient compensation? Inconsistent policies and procedures? The wrong scripts?

There is more and more focus in today's call center on selling. And whether it's an outbound center whose sole purpose is telemarketing, or a traditional inbound customer service center that has decided to seize the opportunity and gain some additional revenues through an up-sell/cross-sell process, it's becoming increasingly important to polish sales skills.

This article will address the three critical steps in setting up a successful telephone selling program.

Step 1: Identify the Right People.

The most critical factor in successful selling is getting the right people for

the job in the first place. Therefore the first step in the process is a careful screening and profiling of candidates to see who is most likely to be successful and happy in a sales role. Whether you're hiring new employees, or simply identifying people in your existing call center to move into more of a sales role, making the match is critical.

According to Kathy Dean, Senior Partner with Banks and Dean, a company specializing in call center recruiting and screening, "The most critical attribute in predicting sales success on the job is whether a person has 'enterprising' or 'initiating' traits, as opposed to 'responding' traits which are predictors of customer service success. Potential sales reps must be willing and wanting to sell."

One of the ways to determine candidates' fit is to determine what motivates them. Are they motivated by money? A challenge? The satisfaction of helping someone or solving a problem? Those motivated by money or a challenge will likely

find sales a rewarding experience. On the other hand, the candidates whose test scores show they are adverse to risk probably won't make good sellers, since hearing "no" is a frequent part of any sales process.

Dean recommends that a company wishing to increase its sales effectiveness screen potential candidates and group them by strengths. Typically there will be three groups: ones with natural sales talent and attributes, those with "trainable" talent, and those with low potential for sales. While the people in the latter group might make excellent service reps, investing in sales training for this group is likely to yield little return.

The other two groups however can benefit from a sales training process. Let's discuss now what this sales training should entail.

Step 2: Deliver Targeted Training.

Once you've identified the right people for the job, the next step is to equip them with the knowledge and skills to make the sale. A successful sales training program should include a variety of components in order to prepare front-line reps to persuade



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RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings

Eight “SIZZLING” Summer Leadership Tips

By Kathleen M. Peterson
Chief Vision Officer, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.

Summer ... AHHH. It brings back memories of lazy days, no school, taking it easy, and playing with friends. I guess you can see where I am - longing for those carefree days! Although we have all grown up, summer remains the classic time of year for vacations, family time, and perhaps a bit of a slowdown in day-to-day business activities (unless of course this IS your busy season). Summer also opens up opportunities to engage in quick and thoughtful analysis of your organization, your leadership, and the future of both.

I think of the following as “SIZZLERS” - things normally considered to be “back burner” that are brought forward to prepare for fall, budgets, holidays, etc.

TAKE OFF - Inventory your staff’s vacation time. *Who has some? Who hasn’t taken any?* Remind your folks to get this scheduled. I witnessed the power of vacations in a client engagement where the unit leader went to all his people and reminded them of the vacation days they had left (the HR policy was use or lose). He began this task early in the spring and proactively saw to it that his team

had scheduled their vacations. He also saw to it that they actually TOOK them. Often this is not a problem for hourly workers. They have excellent time off inventory skills. But it may be worth looking at your management team, and of course yourself. There is no glory in not taking your vacation. If you feel that your organization cannot get along without you, that is a MUCH bigger problem.

HAVE SOME FUN - Sponsor something “spirited” and fun. Ask the front line to come up with an activity, contest, game, or theme for an event and then GO FOR IT. If your first thought is, “We have no budget for that,” shame on you! Creativity is the name of the game in hard times. Think in terms of “*what we can do.*” Create a TAKE OFF board. Ask staff to post pictures, funny stories, etc., about what they did during their TAKE OFF. You never know what you may learn about people! Sponsor a beach day at the office. Bring in beach balls, blow them up, and bounce them around the Center (high school graduations comes to mind). Create a *fun* distraction. Ask for suggestions to BEAT THE HEAT. Often, people have great ideas. Who knows ... this could be something you publish to the rest of the enterprise.

READ UP - Summer is always known for reading. *What are your favorite beach books or summer reads?* Start a book sharing program. Read something fun about business ... maybe some new slant on customer

service skills or how customers are changing. Discover new ways to thrill and delight those you serve. Be the leader that sponsors growth in a multitude of ways that are not always strictly job related.

REMOVE THE ROSE COLORED GLASSES - Take a good hard look around your operation. Deliberately separate yourself from your business unit to get a new perspective. Ask some of your colleagues to give you an honest view of how they see your operation. Pretend you are in the acquisition business. *Would you buy your department? If not, why not? If so, why? What do you offer? What are you really good at? Where are the weaknesses? What needs to be improved?* I believe that the number one issue in operational improvement is leadership blindness - being blind to issues and operational realities and enjoying sublime beliefs that differ greatly from reality. Here’s a case in point. I am reading the book entitled *Provenance*, a real life account of an art forger and a con man who were able to sell hundreds of fake pieces of art, largely due to the experts’ desire to believe in authenticity and to negate the obvious indicators of fraud. Belief and certainty can be so strong; they blind us to areas of weakness. So in this case, it would be TAKE OFF the rose colored glasses and force yourself to take a “real life” view.

BE SPECIFIC - The time has come to master the *art* of specificity. We are



RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings

surrounded by the hollow ring of objectives, desires, goals, and the like that are organized around concepts such as “provide a great customer experience.” Often, ZERO work has been done to clearly define what that means and what that requires from a process, technology, financial, training, hiring, and (most importantly) behavioral perspective. When definition is lacking, folks are free to make up their own mind about what the experience ought to be and to act accordingly. *How well defined are your objectives? Are they specific enough? Check again ...*

DON'T JUMP... TO SOLUTIONS -

We recently chose to decline two potential engagements because the requests to implement “solutions” did not emerge from a very well-defined and specific problem. Both requests had to do with developing training solutions for what we deemed to be process and operational issues. One engagement had the goal to “change the culture” of the Contact Center via a training program. We felt very strongly (and even more so after some due diligence) that the up front work was incomplete. The determination that this was a training issue was made way too early and with too little information. My experience told me that whoever took on this assignment was doomed to failure because it is very unlikely that any stand-alone training program would have the desired impact. Despite these challenging times, we

could not in good conscience proceed with a proposal as requested. Be sure you know WHAT you're trying to accomplish before looking for HOW to accomplish it.

THINK PROCESS - Process is the ultimate protector of productivity. We all need to do more with less. But assume that you have had (like so many others) to justify all your head count expense. Before doling out pink slips, look for productivity gains by addressing operational processes. First identify them; then organize processes *by frequency and complexity*. Your focus needs to be on the high frequency events and activities. These are NOT necessarily the most talked about! Focus your analytical energy on high frequency contacts; this approach assures that you are attacking the processes that will yield the greatest return. Look at each step in the process and identify ways to improve.

HIRE SOMEONE SMARTER THAN YOU

- One of the best moves I have ever made in the 22 years of owning my business has been hiring people that were SMARTER and DIFFERENT from me. Leaders often suffer from the (dare I say it?) narcissistic tendency to hire folks more like themselves. It is comfortable, non-threatening, and ultimately not much good to the organization or to the leader. Leaders need to find complementary skills, to fill in gaps, and enjoy the challenges that come from another perspective.



Of course, it is important to avoid the snipers. Learn to be specific about requirements and honestly challenge your own comfort zone. This is truly a skill required to genuinely progress as a leader and in your career.

Enjoy the rest of the summer! And as Henry James wrote, “Summer afternoon - Summer afternoon ... the two most beautiful words in the English language.”

(#28, Eight “SIZZLING” Summer Leadership Tips, July 2009)

"I'm not listening"



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customers to say “yes!”

In addition to the obvious training about the products or services to be sold, it's also important to cover the basics of telephone selling. These basics include:

1. Customer profiling. It's important to understand what the customer's “pain” is so a product or service can be positioned to alleviate it. Customer profiling includes recognizing a prospect's readiness to buy.
2. Effective opening. The first 15 seconds of a call play a significant role in whether the prospect buys into the sales process. Sales reps need to learn to deliver an opening to establish an atmosphere of cooperation and trust.
3. Information probing. Effective listening is critical to discover the prospect's needs

and wants. Even if the up-sell item has already been determined, good listening skills will help with formulating the selling strategy.

4. Overcoming objections. Unlike the traditional “combat zone” approach, managing resistance is really about learning how to help buyers reach a “comfort zone” that enables the conversation and sale to go forward.

5. Improving voice tone. Something as simple as tone of voice can have a significant effect on a sale. Sales reps should know the basic techniques of making a good impression not only with what they say, but how they say it.

6. Fine-tuning vocabulary. Buyer response can be improved simply by using more positive phrasing and eliminating negative vocabulary from the sales call. Sales reps should have a full repertoire of visual words, affirming sentences, and motivating phrases to improve customer response.

7. Closing the sale. The close of the sales call is every bit as critical as the opening. Sales reps should know how to ask for a decision, whether it's taking an order or arranging for a follow-up call.

The types of training mentioned above can be delivered in a variety of ways. More and more e-



learning options exist where students can proceed through a prescribed sales training course at their own pace. However, given the degree of practice that's needed to get all the skills and steps right, instructor-led training with a knowledgeable facilitator will typically yield better and longer-term results. And to maximize the impact of the sales training program, you'll want to follow up with frequent side-by-side coaching to fine-tune the newly learned skills even further.

Third Step: Measure and Reward.

We can't really talk about selling without talking about incentive programs. The type of reward system and the way it's administered is the third critical ingredient in a successful selling program.

Those call centers whose sole purpose is to make outbound calls and sell typically have a simpler, more direct policy on the call process and on incentives. Policies are generally not so well defined for inbound call centers, especially those that serve primarily as service or support centers. Each organization must make a policy decision on the degree to which up-selling will be attempted and how it will be rewarded.

First, will agents be expected to attempt the up-

sell on every call? Or will they be able to select the callers that appear to be good up-sell candidates? Some organizations force the up-sell on every call and obviously maximize their potential incremental revenue. But in some cases, this up-sell is done at the risk of damaging the service component of the call and the overall customer relationship.

For example, I recently placed a catalog order, and being in a bit of a hurry, I told the agent taking my order that the one item was all I wished to order. This catalog always offers a few up-sell items, and generally I don't mind hearing about the specials, but on this occasion, I was ready to simply finish up my order and move on. Even after saying I did not wish to order anything else or hear about specials, the agent proceeded through the up-sell script anyway. When I expressed my displeasure about the offer, the agent explained that she "was forced to offer the additional items" on every single call.

Clearly, this was a case where the agent should have had the flexibility to go with the flow of the call. Doing so would have done more to solidify the customer relationship so that I'd be back for another order in the future. While it's understandable that organizations want staff to up-sell if reps are available and the queue is under control, it's my opinion that

it should not be forced on every call.

Some organizations would argue that unless it's forced, some reps (like Alex in our first example) simply won't do it. The reasons they won't voluntarily do it in most cases, are 1) they're personality types that are afraid of rejection, and/or 2) they haven't been properly trained on how to do it. Do the first two steps of hiring and training properly, and you should have a workforce that's willing and able to up-sell. Then I believe you can leave the decision in the agents' hands about when it's appropriate to up-sell or not.

With respect to incentives, one of the most common questions is whether to compensate for "making the offer" versus "making the sale". While the first will certainly increase the number of attempts, these attempts might be poorly timed or delivered. A better policy is to reward the actual sales results, or at least a combination or ratio of the two. You may have measures that evaluate the ratio of offers to sales or simply the ratio of sales to the number of calls handled. Another possibility is to look at sales per signed-on minute to evaluate staff productivity.

Now the Up-Sell

Now that we've sold you on the three steps of a basic selling program, would you like to read about some

special tips for the telephone selling process?

Now that wasn't so hard, was it? And with an enticing enough offer, your phone up-sell should be well accepted as well!

Here are some final up-selling tips for your phone reps:

1. Fully complete the original sale before the up-sell process begins. Sometimes in the rush to offer the add-on product, an agent forgets some detail of the original order. Pushing additional items too early may turn off the customer and jeopardize the original sale.
2. Offer familiar items in the up-sell. The more familiar a customer is with the add-on item, the more likely he is to buy. New products take time to explain and sell, so up-selling is not the time to sell these unless the price is incredibly low.
3. Provide useful advice based on other customer purchases. Your marketing department can provide you the correlations to fill in the blanks, "Many of our customers who order a ___ also order a ___ to go with it. Would you like one also?"
4. Limit up-sell items to less than 25% of the original order. Even if customers are open to the up-sell, they generally have a mental limit of the amount they're willing to spend and in the numbers we've seen, it's typically 25% or less.
5. Finally, here's a tip from Mary Beth Ingram of Phone



Pro. Think of up-selling as dessert. Picture yourself in a nice restaurant after a lovely meal. The waiter comes by to see if you'd like dessert. Perhaps you're too full from dinner to consider it, but you're certainly not offended that he asked. Getting agents to think about up-selling as a nice "dessert" offering can sometimes go a long way to overcoming the reluctance to make the offer.

Creating a successful selling or up-selling program is a matter of putting the right people on the phones, training them properly, and creating policies and incentives to make them successful. Once in place, you'll be able to maximize your

dialogues with customers and impact the bottom line significantly. Happy selling!

About the Author....

Penny Reynolds is a Founding Partner of **The Call Center School**, a Nashville, Tennessee based consulting and education company. The company provides a wide range of educational offerings for call center professionals, including traditional classroom courses, a 50-topic web seminar program, and self-paced e-learning programs. Penny can be reached at penny.reynolds@thecallcenterschool.com or at 615-812-8410.

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Our Old Assumptions Don't Hold: Requirements, Adherence, and Non-Traditional Channels

Ric Kosiba, Ph.D.
President, Bay Bridge
Decision Technologies

Things Are About To Become Much Busier For Us

If there is one obvious contact center trend in the last few years, it is this: the management of the "new" contact center channels and multiple sites/regions is rapidly becoming consolidated. Email, chat, instant messaging, branch offices, back-office and casework processing across multiple centers and regions are being handed over to contact center planners in

order to take advantage of the hard earned expertise we have each developed. It is thought that many of the economies we have brought to our call center plans, and some of the mathematical wizardry we possess, can be brought to bear to help our companies again do more with fewer resources. We workforce management types are about to get a lot more work and a lot more responsibility. This makes a whole lot of sense. Our companies have other operations that are large, people-intensive, and queue-based. Sounds like a job for the workforce management gurus! To complicate matters, these contact types – email, chat, instant messaging, back-office and casework processing – are expected

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to be handled by groups of multi-skilled and multi-tasked agents and we are expected to have in our bag of tricks the methods and computing power to staff and plan for these more complex operations. If you aren't responsible for these lines of business yet, you soon will be. Congratulations, I think.

Let's Discuss Complexity First

In the world of computer models (like our contact center strategic planning and workforce management systems) there is a concept called computational complexity. Basically, mathematicians can look at a math (or business) problem and determine how hard it is for

a computer to solve. We are getting to the point where the problems we are trying to solve are very difficult, not just because of our lack of decision support systems, but because the math, by its very nature is intrinsically tough. The scheduling problems and the planning problems associated with these more complex multi-channel operations are very computationally difficult (Google NP-Hard Mathematical Complexity). So that's difficulty number one.

But We've a Bigger Problem: Current WFM Concepts May Not Hold
We've been doing a fair amount of research into these newer problems, and

we may have uncovered a truth that I hadn't heard from others, and it is this: many of the concepts and constructs associated with our traditional workforce management processes probably do not have much meaning in this new, more complicated world. The ways we traditionally develop our plans (first we forecast, then we build requirements, and then we build schedules), the way we track schedule compliance, and the ways we manage our employees may not be ideal or even correct in a multi-channel environment. Here is an example. Quite a few years ago, while working at a very large collections center, I was responsible for scheduling our collections

agents. These calls were a combination of inbound and outbound calls. When trying to develop work schedules, it was very clear that the standard models –build requirements, then schedules, then track adherence – did not make as much sense for the outbound component. What, after all, is an outbound requirement? The answer is, of course, there is no outbound requirement, because a calling attempt can be made at any time on any day. There is, however, outbound calling efficiency; outbound calling attempts to a home address are much more effective early in the weekday morning, in the evenings, and on the weekends. However, the concept of a requirement-

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where agents absolutely must be on the phones at a particular time- has no real meaning. So what did that mean to our scheduling process? It meant that the standard mathematical algorithms were not applicable. We had to develop our own methodologies and algorithms, which we did. We later even went so far as to allow agents to develop their own outbound work schedules – but that is a very cool story for another day. These are the next batch of difficulties.

We Need New Models

As in the previous example, the outbound math model is very different from our standard Erlang model. An outbound operation is different from an inbound operation which is different from an email operation which is different from a processing operation. And because of this, the models, in order to be even moderately accurate, must be different too. Standard Erlang does not apply to email, outbound, or processing centers. To determine the relationship between staffing, handle times (or servicing standards), contact volumes, and operational performance, you need to develop an accurate model of your operations, with the proper queuing structure, the correct operational metrics, and the appropriate service timeframes. For example, a staffing model with a 24-

hour service standard is not well served by a 15-minute interval requirement model. The only model that makes sense in such a situation is one of much longer duration than the service standard and the average processing times. Further, deferred work, by its nature involves deciding to warehouse contacts for some period of time. This warehoused work must be considered when developing staff plans; a critical part of your staffing decisions involves tracking and managing this backlog of work tasks (more on this in a bit).

Old Concepts Don't Apply: Requirements, Adherence, and Occupancy

Let's talk requirements first. For outbound contact types it is clear that the concept of the traditional staffing requirement is nonsense. How about email? For work that can be deferred, work like email and back office processing, the concept of interval requirements has much less meaning. If your performance standard is expressed in several hours to a few days, what does it matter that you have employees show up to work at exactly 9:00AM? Further, a requirement that X people work in hour 1 and Y people work in hour 2 is probably as effective as a requirement that Y people work in hour 1 and X people work in hour 2. Or X+Y people work in hour 1 and no people work in hour 2. See where I am

going with this? The whole concept that "you have to have so many people on the floor at this interval" makes little practical sense. What does this mean to our standard view of our daily staffing? Our standard approach is to look at an over/under graph or report to determine if we need folks to work later or go home earlier. Without a solid requirement calculation, this over/under picture is, well, not too terribly clear. Over what? Under what? How does this real issue affect our management of interval staffing? Let's extend this to the concept of agent adherence. For outbound contacts, email, and back office processing, does the concept of non-adherence have much operational value? I think it probably does not, except as a means to oversee our agent's productivity (in a Big Brother sort of way). Simply, does it matter if an email agent returns from their break 10 minutes early or late as long as we get the proper amount of work from them? In most cases, I think the answer is no- it does not matter to our efficiencies that an agent is a little sloppy with their schedule adherence. How about agent occupancy? As far as I can tell, the concept of occupancy for these other contact types has meaning only insofar as agent task completion times (e.g. AHT) and expected workload are matched with the overall daily or weekly staffing levels. It has less to

do about the economies of the operation. While semi-random inter-arrival rates of contacts will be similar to that of call centers, the email or back office operation is expected to almost always require a queue and, hence, occupancy is by definition near 100%. Also, for the chat contact type, the number of concurrent chat sessions is a variable that changes our overall definition of occupancy. For example, an agent who can handle 3 chat sessions at a time may be fully busy on one chat session, but still only be 1/3 occupied. These are also difficulties we must overcome.

The Concepts of Capture, Purity, and Queue Ebb and Flow

Any time that agents are expected to be multi-skilled (especially having skills across multiple channels), the concept of capture and purity becomes super important. These two metrics represent a way to prioritize staffing solutions in an environment that has a whole bunch of potential "right" answers. Here is an example, and then we'll discuss each metric's definition. Let's say I have two call types and two agent groups, and let's call them customer service and sales. Given my druthers, I would prefer my sales calls to go to my sales agents, and my customer service calls to go to my customer service agents, but for cost reasons, we cross utilize these groups. All things



being equal (like handle times and wage rates), if my agents can handle either sales or customer service contacts, then the “optimal” staff plan would necessarily include solutions that are any combination of sales or customer service agents. For instance, I can staff with 100% sales agents, or 100% customer service agents, or any combination in between, and I would be “optimally” staffed. But we know that this is not optimal, because I would like each call to go to its right place – I’d like my sales folks to work on sales and my customer service folks to work on customer service calls. This is where the concepts of capture and purity come in (borrowed from a very smart customer of ours, by the way). Capture rate is simply the percentage of contacts that end up where you want them to end up. In our example, the sales capture rate is the percentage of sales calls that are answered by a sales agent. Purity rate is merely the percentage of time that an agent spends working the types of calls we want them to work. In our example, the customer service purity rate is the percentage of the time a customer service agent is on the phone with a customer service call. These concepts are critical to determining your truly realistic optimal staffing levels. You can add an additional constraint – your capture rate constraint – to your staffing optimization to

get to an answer that is truly optimal. For instance, we can staff both of our customer service and our sales agent groups to hit both our service goals and our capture rate goals. This creates a staffing problem that has as its solution an answer that is both at least cost and hits your servicing strategy preference. Any multi-skill or multichannel plan that does not include a concept like capture rate is simply a guess. Finally, deferred work, like email, leads to queue behaviors that have a specific tipping point. That is, in your operation at any point in time, you are most likely to be either building a queue or working down a queue. This is a very good thing; it allows you to disconnect staffing requirements from the work arrival patterns. Unlike the call center environment, processing centers allow managers to spread the work across their peaks and valleys of arrivals, saving staffing costs. The trick is to make sure the queue lengths are never too long or nonexistent. The tipping point is the staffing level that turns a queue building operation into a queue reduction operation. Does your work backlog ebb and flow in your current email staff planning model? Can you account for work that remains at the end of a day or week in your staffing plan? Do your service metrics include queue counts at various servicing timeframes? If not, you don’t have a workforce

model that mimics your real world operation, and it is time to build a better one.

Tactical and Strategic Plans Start to Blur

There has always been a bright line between strategic plans and tactical workforce management plans. But in contact types that involve work that can be deferred and long servicing times, the more pertinent question is not scheduling, but long term staffing. It is more important that you have the right number of agents trained and on the premises than it is that you have rigid and exact interval schedules. Interval plans aren’t as important. The strategic planning problem (determining when and where to hire our agents over longer time horizons) for these types of operations is more important than traditional tactical workforce management. Improving daily agent planning has much less value in these operations than in our regular inbound call center operation. You need to solve your strategic planning problem well to gain any efficiency associated with your planning process.

It is Time to Revise Our Systems and Our Thinking

These new operational constructs, these new approaches have our workforce planning vendors scrambling to develop new algorithms and approaches to help us solve these

bigger problems. There will be (and absolutely should be) a slew of modeling approaches newly developed, and these need to be skeptically tested by all. The most basic responsibility of any workforce planning company, be it a tactical workforce management software provider or a long-term strategic capacity planning company, is to prove that their computer models of your operation accurately represent your actual operation. If you cannot prove that the models that drive your critical staff planning decisions are accurate, what is the point? Ask them to provide you this: a validation chart of any of their previous installation’s accuracy. If they cannot show you a plot of actual center service performance versus predicted results, then they and their customers have no idea if their modeling technology is better than a guess. Guessing in our expensive operations can cost your company millions of dollars, and your reputation dearly. With all these changes, the stability of our standard systems is in flux, and you need to know that your planning tools are representing your operation correctly. This is the real difficulty.

Ric Kosiba is co-founder and President of Bay Bridge Decision Technologies. He can be reached at EDK@BayBridgeTech.com or (410) 224-9883.



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

8/4 –“How to Boost Operational Efficiency Through Workforce Management” - NICE - Labor represents two-third or more of total contact center operating costs, so it is vital to make the most of each and every scheduled agent. An operational efficiency strategy can help your contact center reduce costs on hourly and salaried labor, reduce operating expenses, cut your

administrative workload, and reduce agent attrition. With the aid of a comprehensive workforce management solution, these initiatives can reduce overtime hours by six percent or more while improving agent occupancy more than nine percent. Every minute counts in the contact center. Ensure that your organization makes the most efficient use of agent time to protect and build customer value across all communication channels. Take part in our webcast to find out how.<http://www.crmxchange.com/webcast/niceaug09/wfm.asp>

8/13 –“ Should You Build-up Your ‘Social Skills’ in Your Contact Center?” AVAYA - As everything becomes more networked, the possibility of always-on, always-connected, highly personalized media channels will become reality. And the potential for customer contact is endless. But with the proliferation of digital channels such as Twitter and Social Networks like Facebook – how do you leverage them to create enhanced customer service? The presentation will cover the landscape of existing and emerging channels and a discussion of how best to apply them strategically. The speaker will illustrate, with examples from real world experience, how to successfully integrate these new channels to market into

your overall marketing mix. <http://www.crmxchange.com/webcast/avayaaug09.socialmedia.asp>

8/18 “The Evolution of FCR – Evaluating the Experience, Not Just the Call”- NEXIDIA - While most contact centers rely on quality monitoring and data from telephony and CRM systems to measure first call resolution, these approaches usually don't explain WHY customers call back. However, your customers DO. In this webcast you will learn how you can use advanced speech analytics tools to gain rapid insight into WHY customers call back for targeted improvement. You'll discover new and innovative ways of thinking about FCR. <http://www.crmxchange.com/webcasts/nexidiaaug09.fcr.asp>

8/20 - Roundtable: “Speech Self Service - What’s Preventing You From Realizing ROI With Speech?” - With all of us facing tight budgets, every expenditure is thoroughly scrutinized. How can you be sure to get the full ROI you expect from your speech self service? And how can you ensure that you're getting all you can from your speech applications once they're up and running? Our panelists will share their extensive experience for successfully designing, deploying, and managing speech self service. Come armed with your questions for our panel of vendors!

http://www.crmxchange.com/webcast/speechdebate_aug09.asp

###

Call Centre Week Canada, August 17-20, 2009, Toronto, Canada

www.iqpc.com/us/callcentre/canada

Canada's most highly anticipated call centre event returns! **Call Centre Week Canada is taking place August 17-19, 2009 in Toronto, Canada.** www.iqpc.com/us/callcentre/canada

Due to the rapidly changing economic environment, CCW Canada will focus on strategies for weathering the economic storm, including how to retain top performing agents, how to keep top delighters, connect with customers and generate more revenue from existing customers.

Featuring primarily end-user, customer service executive case studies, and in-depth discussions on talent management, metrics/process improvement, remote agents and technologies, Call Centre Week Canada is this can't miss industry event. For more information, please call 1-800-882-8684 or visit www.iqpc.com/us/callcentre/canada

###



The 2009 American Teleservices Association Convention & Expo will be October 4-7 in New Orleans and "Answering the Call" will be the theme. "Answering the Call" is about understanding how to maximize the value of every contact with each and every customer or prospect. What role does teleservices play in the overall economy? How do we address improving our image and calls? How do we use the power of our employment base to make a difference on legislation in Washington DC and our own communities?

New Orleans was selected to answer the philanthropic call of picking a city that needs economic support. The devastation of Katrina is still being felt in New Orleans, and our Convention will bring much needed commerce and tourism dollars to a community still in trouble. Additionally, our Call Centers CARE initiative will put the hearts and hands of our members to use at the end of our event on a Habitat for Humanity project which will make a real difference in the lives of a deserving family.

This year will be a phenomenal balance of great content and great fun. Best of all, our entire Convention is a philanthropic event for the benefit of a community. "I could not be more excited. The last time we held the Convention in New Orleans was pre-Katrina, and I was a volunteer for the ATA as the Chairman of the Board of Directors." said Tim Searcy, ATA CEO.

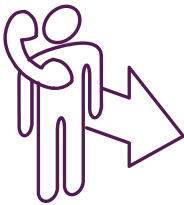
Register now to hear the best speakers the industry has to offer and learn specific ways to take your business to a higher level of

performance. This event is an extraordinary opportunity to network with contact center professionals who are also shaping the future of teleservices.

Early registration savings and event details can be found on the convention web site – www.ata2009convention.org – and new event details are posted daily. In order for you to maximize your time at the event, we're calling on you to do some extra planning. Attendees go away happy when they KNOW their time was well spent. Consider these tips:

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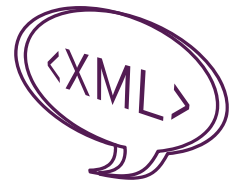
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Register Early – Save \$400 per person when you take advantage of ATA's early registration discount by August 7. Given the budget and ROI concerns we're all facing, why wouldn't you take advantage to save? Be sure to call and reserve your room at the Sheraton New Orleans (504-525-2500) to get into the ATA room block. It's the only place to stay if you want to make the most of your trip.

Build Your Network – Veteran convention-goers know that there will be many opportunities to meet colleagues, future collaborators, and potential vendors. Make sure you plan to attend all of the receptions, exhibit hall functions and special events to get as much

networking time as possible. It's the single-most important reason our attendees come back year after year. Bring plenty of business cards, and don't pass up the chance to introduce yourself, schedule a meeting time, or simply exchange email addresses.

Talk to the ATA Staff – If you're a first time attendee or a new ATA member, don't be shy. Come see the staff, tell us why you're in attendance, ask us to introduce you to others, and let us help you get the experience you're looking for. We want your time in New Orleans to be a great success!

Plan Your Days – Be familiar with the convention program before you arrive.

Hit the key sessions in your area of interest, but then don't be shy about attending a workshop that covers an area you aren't too familiar with - or step into a session with a title that sparks your interest. And leave some time to connect with the people you do business with or want to learn more from. (A detailed agenda will be posted on the Convention web site shortly.)

Capitalize on Your Free Time – Find times in your schedule to grab a cup of coffee with other attendees at Café DuMonde, peruse the exhibits, or hang out in the hotel lounge areas for casual conversations with other ATA members and staff. And make sure you stick with the crowd.

Attend the PAC event – it's the best time of the entire event – and then have fun afterwards. You'll have chances to explore New Orleans after the Tuesday night Awards Gala too.

The ATA is preparing to "Answer the Call", and we hope you will plan to attend. Sponsor and exhibitor opportunities are still available. Contact us at 317-816-9336 for more information about advertising and reserving your booth space now!

By: Marquisha Bridgeman,
Marketing Communications
Specialist
Marquisha@ataconnect.org
317-816-9336

###

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU UP AT NIGHT?

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- Costly Hiring
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- Ineffective Agent Performance
- Legal Compliance
- Inadequate Supervisory Talent
- Unfilled Seats



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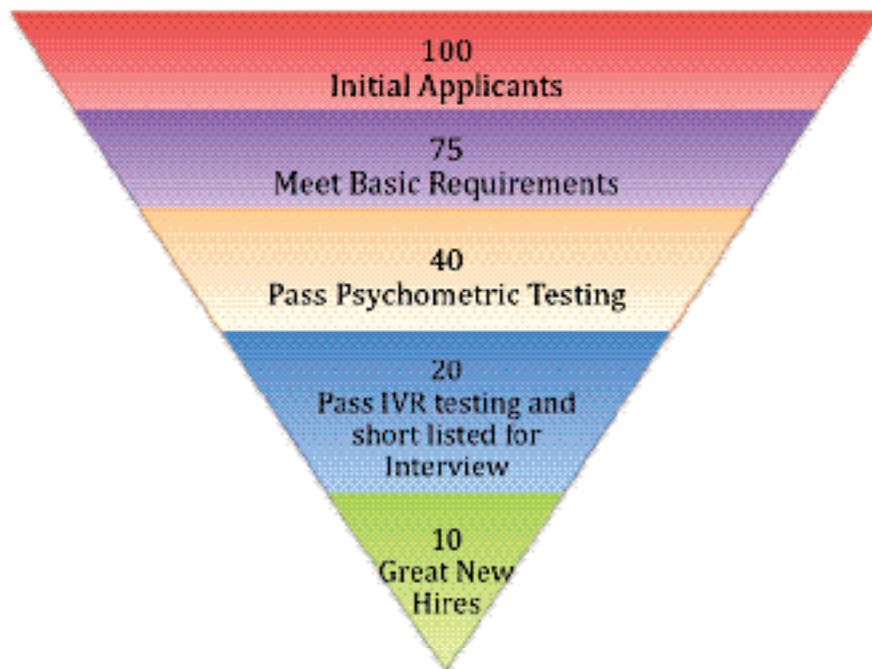
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###

Customizing call scripts can improve employee performance and customer satisfaction
By Jeff Valentine, CEO, Callfinity

Many businesses underestimate the importance of a solid sales script. On the other hand, a rigid sales script can often confine call center operators and make them sound bland and uninspired. Picture a movie with a solid plot but cringe-worthy acting. Even though the content is solid, the lackluster performances of the stars can turn a powerful concept into a snooze fest. In the call center world, the concept is no different. The key to running a successful call center lies in understanding your cast and developing a script that brings out each representative's best performance.

Not all employees and customers are built the same. This isn't exactly ground-breaking news, but many businesses still try to



cut corners by developing a script template and forcing employees and customers to digest the same material over and over. What these managers fail to realize is that a script's success is based on several criteria including the employee's skill set and the customer's needs. Just because one employee is successful using a particular script, doesn't mean another rep will achieve the same results. The same can be said for customers.

When we were younger, most of us were taught that repetition was the key to success. Even though repetition does facilitate learning, it doesn't necessarily result in tremendous achievements. Many individuals get bored with repetition. In fact, force feeding the same script to employees and customers may decrease employee motivation and leave customers dissatisfied.

Your customers don't want to hear a rep reciting the same information every time they call. They want to feel significant, important, and special. At the same time, your employees want to learn new things and develop their skills. Forcing a rep to rattle off the same information on a regular basis may result in lost desire and boredom, which

can only further derail your sales and retention objectives. As a result, Callfinitly offers a variety of flexible, responsive, and customizable products that provide administrators with the tools they need to execute flawless scripts. Callfinitly's solutions provide extensive feedback and clear statistical analysis, making it easy for you to track employee performance and determine which scripts are receiving the best results.

This flexibility allows administrators to develop scripts suitable for each department and determine which scripts have been proven successful with previous customers. If a particular script isn't performing at acceptable standards, it can be edited or deleted in order to achieve the desired results.

Since Callfinitly's call center solutions allow unprecedented customization and extensive monitoring capabilities, administrators can also set up different call scripts based on employee skill sets. By monitoring each representative, the administrator can determine what kind of script will work best for each employee.

If an employee tends to

make more sales without following a script, the administrator can cater to that representative's proficiency by creating a minimal script outline that leaves room for improvisation. On the other hand, an administrator may want new employees to follow a standard script or create an extensive outline for an employee who performs better with a designated script in place.

Scripts can be further modified based on call routing, which is particularly helpful for businesses with several departments. When a customer calls in to the ACD, the menu options they select determine where the call is transferred. If the customer is connecting to sales, a sales script is displayed. If the caller is contacting a member of the marketing department, a completely different script appears.

All of these features make developing, editing, and applying scripts a seamless process. Don't just assume that a standard script is acceptable. By tweaking certain elements, adjusting content for specific customers, and analyzing employee performance, you can improve customer satisfaction and maintain a solid work environment for your call center employees.

Callfinitly provides the easiest to use telecommunications software, systems, and services to contact centers, service providers, and enterprises. Since 1999, over 270 customers in six countries around the world have selected Callfinitly's on-premise equipment and hosted services. For more information about Callfinitly, please visit Callfinitly's Web site at www.callfinitly.com or call (877) 897-2962 (within US) or +1 585-278-1940 (elsewhere).

###

Call Center Times

King Technology Group KtG thrives on a belief that your call center and its production hours come first and foremost in a sense that we understand and have a sense of urgency when your call center has a failure. We understand what it takes to keep your Touchstar system operational in a production environment and how to swiftly solve problems as they arise.

Let our experts at KtG take the call center technicalities off your hands and allow us to let you focus on new ideas that will generate your company revenue!

We are proactive with your system which will involve accessing your systems remotely and optimizing your call center including



the database, telephony, scripting, and networking. Our goal is to solve problems within your current infrastructure and provide new perspectives and solutions; the level in which KtG will participate with your company is in your hands.

King Technology Group provide the following contact center solution services

- Managed Services Support with an emphasis on Touchstar telephony systems
- On-Site Consulting including installation, upgrades, and business development
- VOIP PBX phone systems at an enterprise level with free office to office calling
- Virtual Contact Center Solutions
- Servers, Hardware Replacement, Custom Telephony Servers
- More Personal Attention

Why would you choose to work with a smaller firm like KtG?

KtG is going to save you time and money by introducing competitive solutions.

We're going to work harder for less and be the support you can truly count on.

"King Technology Group has saved my company an

annual cost of \$48,000 in monthly telephone bills. The Touchstar knowledge that KtG possesses has really been a relief over the last two years - as a business owner I am able to divert my attention to more growth and management of my organization."

Richard Hix C.E.O.
Physicians Health Group

"The consultants at KtG are very helpful and typically respond to our Touchstar Call Center problems or questions within a timely manner. Our mortgage firm has had a business relationship with KtG for roughly two years now and it's a good feeling to have someone you can call when your primary source of production and revenue has a failure."

Kenyon Cantino C.E.O.
Rapid One Mortgage

King Technology Group was founded on a simple notion that a business regardless of how big or small requires technical solutions, those solutions must be properly serviced and well maintained. KtG is a growing organization, and we want your Contact Center to be a part of it.

Founder,

Chris King

cking@kingtechnologygroup.com

www.kingtechnologygroup.com

###

Managing Virtual Call Centers by Bridget Guadarrama

Many call centers are struggling with meeting an increasing demand for quality customer service while operational costs continue to rise. The future lies in switching from a traditional brick and mortar business model to a virtual platform or a mix of both. This is where the Northwinds Contact Solutions comes in. We specialize in helping companies transition to virtualization by creating a workforce solution that meets the needs and goals of your company.

The beauty of a virtual call center is that it is essentially like any other call center except for the fact that the representatives are not limited to the confines of a specific geographic location. Employees of a virtual call center can theoretically work from anywhere. The lure for the employee is that they do not have to make a daily commute, schedules can be more flexible, and they can

have a casual dress code. For employers this means big savings on rent and utilities, and their pool of potential employees increases without geographical boundaries. These dual benefits can also result in lower turnover rates.

Virtualization is working out especially well for various corporations of all sizes. With the virtual model many companies prefer to hire employees from a certain radius or drive-time. Having agents live relatively close may be a good idea if you want them to come in for training or have periodical "check-ins." Many companies have agents begin at physical facility and later allow them the ability to work from home. The virtual model is also useful for business' whose calendar year may be more seasonal because they don't have to worry about maintaining facilities that they won't use on a year-round basis. Brick and mortar businesses can even benefit from having a portion of their employees work virtually. Furthermore, the virtual model is an excellent opportunity for people with disabilities who may not be able to leave their homes due to medical reasons.

Another advantage is the potential to reach many more clients worldwide. A



virtual platform has no geographical limits. This allows your company employees to give presentations to clients via virtual platforms or to have virtual meetings. Cutting unnecessary travel costs is in itself a huge advantage. Having a virtual work-from-home platform can be hugely beneficial to a business but how does one go about doing it? Getting started can seem daunting but Northwinds Contact Solutions can help you make a smooth transition.

There are various models to consider. The first model consists of hiring independent contractors who are responsible for their own payroll taxes and they might be subject to business incorporation fees. It is important to note that the taxes these contractors incur are tax deductible and the advantage for contractors is that this structure allows them to work on multiple contracts. The second model is more traditional where the employee receives the same benefits as a brick and mortar employee. This may be more expensive to the employer but the employees' loyalty and motivation is the payout. With this model, many companies prefer to hire employees from a certain radius or drive-time. A third option is to simply hire

employees regardless of location. With this method employees would go through virtual training which may become more popular as many students and entry level workers are becoming accustomed to the online-course model.

Once you decide which model works best for your company you can determine what equipment your employees will provide themselves and what you will provide them. After you have worked out these details you will be on your way to using one of the most innovative and beneficial work models. Although a virtual platform can work wonders for many businesses it may seem like an immense task to maintain it. How do you manage employees that are hundreds of miles away? How do you bring everyone together and achieve the feel of a united company, all while maintaining a satisfied customer base?

While it's a great asset to your business to use a virtual platform, it can be difficult to manage groups of people who are nowhere near you geographically or who maybe don't speak the same language as you due to outsourcing. What you need in order to succeed is workforce management tools. You have to be able to deal with a span of time

zones, schedules, and language. However there are a few components that the Northwinds recommends to make it much easier to integrate your employees.

Consistency. When working with people that are scattered all over the world, it is very important that your technology is the same in each setting. The systems and programs you use should be consistent no matter where your call center representatives are located. Having the same technology helps keep costs down. Consistency also includes the level of customer service that clients receive. You want to make sure your brand is perceived with the same yet relevant image despite language or cultural differences.

Strategy. Although virtualization offers myriad benefits, you need to make sure that it is the right platform for your business. If you still plan to have representatives in a single physical location and nothing else, then a virtualization model isn't necessarily needed. One of the biggest advantages of a virtual platform is that it gives you the potential to reach clients globally. When you do decide to use a virtual platform you need to consider how to manage virtual queues and call

volume. Whether this is determined by language or whichever representative is next, you need to determine what is the best way to filter calls.

Size. Since larger companies are turning to virtualization it is important smaller businesses to "catch up" and a virtual platform gives them the chance to grow exponentially. If large companies can successfully manage their virtual agents then it will be much easier for smaller companies to do so. This is because they will use the same sophisticated management tools but with less people to manage.

Communication. Last but definitely not least is communication. It is perhaps the most important component to optimize your business and ensure your employees are working cohesively. With a virtual platform you have the ability to monitor employees' progress, chat, video conference, and so much more. It is imperative to use these tools to have open lines of two-way communication and enhance internal operations.

Managing virtual call centers can have complicated components because of the dispersal of employees. With the right use of a few simple tools it's



possible to maintain a company that everyone can feel a part of no matter where they're working from. According to many experts it's better to get used to working with the virtual model now because one day it will most likely be the only platform used. Virtualization is here to stay and Northwinds Contact Solutions will be there to show you the way. Just as the internet has become an indispensable part of how we do business, so will virtualization be to various industries. Visit northwindscontactsolutions.com for more information.

Bridget Guadarrama
The Northwinds Contact Solutions Intern
800-831-8083
thenorthwinds.com
5425 E Bell Road, Suite 141
Phoenix, AZ 85254
###

Electrone America Ltd., Co.'s EAL 150: Hope for the Western Call Center

Given the economics of call-center outsourcing, the future of the Western call center industry appears bleak. Businesses are cutting costs by moving their call center operations out of North America and Europe to regions such as Asia and South America, where labor is cheap,

plentiful, and skillful. In the Philippines, local outsourcing industry as a whole is expected to grow by 15% despite the current global economy.

To stay competitive, Western call centers must empower employees with time-saving technology like keyboards from [Electrone Americas Ltd., Co.'s EAL 150 Series](#) of programmable keyboards. These keyboards allow users to accomplish more tasks in less time, thereby decreasing call resolution times and increasing overall efficiency. Each of the keyboards in the range (the EAL 150, 153, and 155) has over 105 programmable keys with 128 bytes of memory per key. In addition to these keys, they also have full QWERTY keyboards.

The programmable keys are easily programmed to store anything from product serial codes to formulas for price calculations. Keys can be programmed to perform menial tasks, such as pulling up product and specification screens. Electrone's [EAL 150 Series](#) keyboards can drill down through multiple screens with the touch of a single key. Furthermore, the keys can simplify performing data entry tasks, including entering authorization codes, standard texts, and

frequently used character strings.

Beyond the aforementioned features, the EAL 153 boasts the added benefits of having 36 LED keys; the EAL 155 has these keys as well as a 2x20 LCD display with a blue backlight. The LEDs in the key switches are ideal for alerting the user to available operations and/or operations requiring attention. The EAL 155's 2x20 character display allows it to be used as a terminal through which to send text alerts to the user from a remote host. The visual aspects of the keyboards series, especially the EAL 153 and 155, can dramatically help call center employees handle calls better and quicker—a benefit companies and their customers can appreciate.

Currently, operators at the emergency response call center for Guadalajara, Mexico is successfully using Electrone's [EAL 150 Series](#) keyboards to rapidly handle calls and dispatch emergency vehicles. Users have said, "I can fly through my work! I honestly think that I can do the work of 3 people."

One of the largest telecommunications companies in the world is now testing [EAL 150 Series](#) keyboards for

implementation at a call center in Spain. This company is amongst the first to acknowledge the benefit of using an elite IT solution to keep call-center operating costs down without outsourcing to Asia, a practice that is rapidly eating away at precious jobs in the West. Electrone invites your company to be the next to profit from the time-saving benefits offered by the [EAL 150 Series keyboards](#).

For more information, please e-mail Gonzalo Perez at GonzaloP@electroneamericas.com or 1-561-395-3398. You can also visit www.electrone.com.

###

IN FOCUS:

Blue Valley Telemarketing – A Great Place to Work by Susan J. Campbell

- "Comfortable and controlled environment"
- "Team-like atmosphere"
- "Positive approach to employee development"
- "A fun place to work"
- "Everyone has a chance for advancement"

These statements are just a few of the positive things that are being vocalized and shared by employees of Blue Valley Telemarketing. Established by Blue Valley Telecommunications in



1991 to inspire economic development within the local community, Blue Valley Telemarketing has grown into one of the most successful employers in Northeast Kansas.

With the purchase of Integrated Sales Solutions, Inc. in 2004, Blue Valley Telemarketing has experienced exceptional growth. The completion of this acquisition created projections of 15% growth in the first year in publications. Instead, Blue Valley experienced 60% growth in the first year and an average of 40% over the past four years.

The company's constant dedication to quality and professionalism has led to its continuing growth in a competitive market. As a cooperative, Blue Valley Telemarketing employees do more than just work for the company; they also take an ownership, which has helped to drive its consistently low turnover.

While the Blue Valley story today is an exciting one, the road to telemarketing success has not been an easy one. The emergence of Blue Valley Telemarketing in Home, Kansas was first seen as a blessing to the local economy as it not only brought jobs, it also delivered economic stimulus to the local

economy, benefitting everyone.

With the development of the National Do Not Call List and the growing stigma associated with telemarketing in the mind of the consumer, Blue Valley developed a bit of a black eye. Locals did not understand the industry and the company floundered in its attempt to create a positive working environment.

Now in its 18th year of operation, Blue Valley Telemarketing has hit a new high. With a change in management, the company is back on track to becoming one of the more preferred employers in the area. Instead of focusing on simply hitting numbers, the company is now focused on developing a strong team that works together to achieve strategic performance standards that are readily rewarded.

By focusing on developing employees as part of the overall strategic approach to strong performance, Blue Valley Telemarketing is growing like never before. As a company focused on developing an environment that creates enthusiasm for the job, Blue Valley is finding itself for the first time in a position where it has to turn away qualified

applicants, simply because supply is exceeding demand.

For site supervisor Damon, the trip to management has been surreal: "I never thought that I would have the opportunity to advance like I have had here, especially in a short amount of time. In the past year, I have seen so much excitement build for the company and I now look forward to every company meeting. The communication that is now in place and the positive feedback make Blue Valley less like a traditional work environment and more like a family."

Amy Detimore agrees. As the Director of Client Services, Amy does everything from interacting with clients, to getting projects ready to go to measuring actual performance. Over 15 years with Blue Valley Telemarketing, Amy has seen and experienced all of the changes in the industry and is excited about what is happening at Blue Valley now.

"We are definitely on a path where employees can have fun while doing their jobs," said Detimore. "We are much more focused on motivation, but also on empowering employees to provide feedback and suggestions for how we

should be doing things. That approach, coupled with specific programs and games helps to create an environment where people want to come to work."

Change is one thing that Blue Valley is not immune to. The company experienced a change of management in September that both employees and board members alike are calling a key driver of the positive direction the company has taken in the past year. What was once considered to be an endless cycle of working toward an invisible goal is now an invigorating career where employees can set their own goals and earn incentives for a job well-done.

The positive approach to work extends into the activities that Blue Valley participates in within the community. From scholarships on the telco side to local parades and organizational support, Blue Valley Telemarketing continues to put a priority focus on supporting local initiatives that benefit those within the community.

While Blue Valley Telemarketing has been on a strong growth path, the company believes the positives within the past year are really just the beginning. Publication sales have increased



tremendously, increasing the demand for skilled employees as the company works toward its capacity goals. With a priority put on a positive approach to both internal and external service, Blue Valley anticipates an even better future.

###

Improve Customer Experience in Your Contact Center with Unified Communications

Darryl Wilson, Area Practice Director – Dimension Data

Imagine a customer calling into your organization's contact center and getting the answers to their inquiries immediately. For many organizations, the contact center is typically the first line of customer service; unfortunately, however, it is often unable to answer all of the questions customers may have. In too many instances, customers calling a business request specific information about the company and its products or services that traditional contact center agents can't provide due to the limitations of what information and which experts they can access.

Contact centers perform poorly for a number of reasons. First, many

organizations lack effective internal communication and information management systems for their geographically dispersed agents to quickly resolve client requests. Likewise, sometimes contact centers lack the information and knowledge required to resolve a client request because that information may reside with employees who are not part of the "traditional" contact center environment. In such cases, contact center agents will try to refer customers to the Web site for more information, indicate someone will call them back, or place them on hold indefinitely while researching the issue – an often futile task that further aggravates the customer. The failure to quickly provide answers ultimately negatively impacts client satisfaction and client loyalty.

Fortunately, unified communications can help contact centers improve performance and increase overall customer satisfaction. Unified communications allows for the real-time redirection of a voice, text or e-mail message to the device closest to the intended recipient, at any given time. In short, any device (e.g., phone, mobile device, PDA, PC, etc.) can communicate with any application (e.g., voice,

visual, instant messaging, ERP, etc.) at any time (e.g., whether the individual is on the road, at the office, at home, etc). For example, voice calls to desk phones can be routed to the user's cell phone when required. E-mail intended for a desktop mailbox can be sent to the user's PDA or turned into speech for a phone message.

By enabling corporate-wide presence and preference information in the network, contact centers can now extend their resources to knowledge workers within the organization. This enhanced collaboration among agents and experts, as well as faster access to critical information that customers are requesting, can help improve the customer experience and contribute to better client loyalty.

In order for unified communications to achieve this, many network services must exist that integrate all the organizations corporate communications applications. Identity and presence are two key network-based services that are required to enable unified communications in the organization. They should be centrally deployed and managed in order to allow network-based applications to access the information.

Although presence is a service that is currently receiving a lot of industry attention, it has been used in communications for a long time. Presence, in its simplest form, is the ability to signal whether or not an individual is "available" for communications. The first implementation of presence for communications was the traditional "busy signal" callers used to frequently hear, signaling someone was on the phone. Contact centers have essentially been using this form of presence for a long time since the automatic call distribution system (ACD) will only route calls to non-busy agents. Contact center agents often signal the ACD through desktop applications or through their phone presence status.

More recently, the concept of presence has been introduced to the enterprise through the general use of instant messaging (IM) clients like MSN, Yahoo and AIM. New knowledge workers entering the workforce are expecting organizations to supply them with the communications tools they are accustomed to using. If organizations do not develop a strategy for this communications evolution, they will expose their communications infrastructure to security risks as employees will find ways to use



communications tools that are not supported by I.T.

Leveraging corporate-wide presence can now yield significant benefits for contact centers by enabling them to leverage non-traditional agents. These subject matter experts or knowledge workers can now help the contact center improve overall customer satisfaction and improve first-call resolution. Contact centers can set up these “Buddy Lists” organized by skill or function. When customers request specific information, the contact center agent can now have access to expert resources with real-time presence information. Agents can ask questions via instant message or could seamlessly initiate a conference call with the subject matter expert.

One such solution is the Cisco Unified Expert Advisor, which expands the scope of the contact center by allowing presence-enabled knowledge workers to handle incoming customer calls without the need for the rigid tools and business rules typically found in traditional contact centers. This feature can be deployed as an add-on to a Cisco Contact Center solution or in standalone mode without formal contact center agents in the call flow.

Finally, in order to truly take advantage of unified communications with presence, an organization must not only have the technical components in place, but it must also have a corporate culture that embraces collaboration

technologies. All employees within the organization must work towards achieving high customer satisfaction and loyalty. Non-traditional contact center agents – the knowledge workers — showing “available” on their presence, for example, should be ready and willing to help contact center agents with customer inquiries. If an organization can achieve this culture with the right technical architecture and solutions in place, it will see improved customer satisfaction.

Now, although it would never happen — imagine if a customer called into your contact center and received that archaic busy signal; they would no doubt

question your company’s customer service – not to mention your lack of investment in enhancing the customer experience. As difficult as it is to envision, your contact center’s traditional information management systems may

soon be perceived similarly as the use of unified communications in the contact center continues to take hold. In the future, customers will become accustomed to the many

benefits offered by these technologies and even grow to expect them from every company they call. So begin to plan your unified communications strategy now as it is not a solution that can be implemented overnight. Don’t let your technologies – and even your company itself — go the way of the traditional busy signal.

Darryl Wilson is the area practice director for Dimension Data. Dimension Data is a specialist I.T. services and solutions provider that helps clients plan, build, support and manage their network and I.T. infrastructures. Dimension Data applies its expertise in networking, security, operating

environments, storage and contact center technologies and its unique skills in consulting, integration and managed services to create customized client services.

###

BETTER, NOT BUSIER

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR COLLECTIONS RESOURCES

By Bill Andrews

“I couldn’t fix your brakes, but I did make your horn louder.” When it comes to Collections call centers, the equivalent of that faux fix would be technology that keeps agents busier but not more productive.

These days there seems to be heightened emphasis on metrics like idle time and talk time and on “brute force” technologies like powerful dialers. Clearly these are not irrelevant matters, but they can also obscure the real key to success in collections.

More than one client has said anxiously, after a campaign that yielded more right party contacts, fewer wrong party contacts, more promises to pay, more promises kept, and more dollars collected, “But my idle time is up. My idle time is up.”

It is true that enforced idleness hinders collections



agents and it is sometimes true that a shortage of lines is the culprit. Keeping enough lines available is costly. Three lines per agent is a common standard; recent industry research counsels that seven lines significantly increases agents' talk time. But aligning the number of lines to peak demand can be uneconomical, with centers paying for the maximum number of lines all the time even though contact rates vary over the course of the day.

Instead, some centers find it useful to install the largest dialers available but then staff them with half the manufacturer-recommended number of agents, so that each agent has twice as many lines to use. Others opt for a hosted dialer to launch huge numbers of calls and then make lines available on an as-needed basis, so that the user pays for only the capacity required. These and other strategies are intended to minimize agent idle time.

Idle time is costly. Our research, captured in this whitepaper, [How Much Is an Agent's Minute Worth?](#), shows that the lost opportunity cost of two minutes of agent downtime per day can easily run to \$1.35 million per year.

But let's take a broader look at the collections challenge. The recession has boosted call center collections volumes to record levels. Harassment suits against collectors are being filed at a record pace. People in debt have become harder to reach, and when reached, more likely to be unable to pay. So collections call centers are in an all-out battle to optimize everything: their agents, their technologies, their analytics, and of course the people being called. In every case the question is, "How can we get the most out of all of these resources?"

Dialers that ramp up the number of calls may reduce idle time, but they can have undesirable side effects. They increase wrong party contacts. They increase answering-machine contacts. They increase the potential for more harassment suits and related fines. Overcalled customers are less likely to pay and more likely to take future business elsewhere.

There are policy-related issues as well. Attempting to stave off legislation and lawsuits, many call centers are setting self-imposed limits on the number of times customers can be called. With high-volume dialers, the limits can be reached early in the day, leaving no accounts to call

later in the day when customers are typically more reachable.

One alternative, of course, is to staff to the contact curve. Instead of setting up overlapping morning and evening shifts so that peak staff availability is in the middle of the day when calls are less likely to be answered, it is more productive to staff more heavily at the beginning and end of the day, during prime dialing hours.

Such staffing models are difficult to achieve with full-time staff, but many centers are finding that students and stay-at-home parents make good, eager part-time employees who are comfortable working during the non-traditional hours that are primetime calling hours. In a profession that typically sees a lot of burnout and turnover, it is not surprising that part-time employees whose work hours suit their larger priorities, typically have higher morale, higher productivity, and lower burnout than full-time employees.

Another alternative is to focus on Right Party Contacts (RPCs), making calls made more productive so that fewer calls are required. Recent research by ALI Solutions supports this option. RPC calls last 4-6 minutes, compared to

less than a minute for Wrong Party Contacts and a few seconds for Non Contacts. RPCs are also a small percentage of the total calls made – 1-3 percent. Dialers launch many calls to generate the handful of RPCs an agent handles each hour, dialing faster and faster as contact rates drop.

With the call centers in our study averaging about 240 calls per agent hour, *an increase of just one RPC per hour could eliminate the need for 24 other calls*, saving line expense accordingly and increasing the likelihood of payments collected. This also provides for less negative impact on customers, while employee morale is boosted by the increased effectiveness of their talk time.

How to increase RPCs? Technology that keeps agents busier must be deployed in concert with analytics and tools that are proven to make calls more productive, not just more numerous. These include automated centralized campaign management, better predictive analytics for reaching customers at the right time, treatments carefully aligned to each customer's predilections, and continual measurement of what works and what does not.



Bill Andrews, ALI Solutions,
bandrews@alisolutions.com,
(503) 614-0379

###

AROUND AND ABOUT....

InVision Enterprise WFM Release 4.7 now available

InVision Software, a world-leading supplier of enterprise-wide workforce management (WFM) solutions, has released its latest installment of the software solution InVision Enterprise WFM, version 4.7. The new software release is now available, boasting over 100 new functions. It includes numerous innovative features for integrated time management as well as several program enhancements that make optimized staff planning more comfortable and more reliable than ever before.

The innovations found in InVision Enterprise WFM 4.7 focus on the “Rules Engine” introduced in version 4.6 for [work time management](#). The “Rules Engine” is based on RDL (Rule Definition Language), a programming language developed by InVision.

Using RDL, users can create and manage complex rule structures fine-tailored to a country, sector and individual company.

“In contrast to classical approaches to time management, our software solution offers a host of advantages. However, the main advantage is the program’s flexibility,” says Peter Bollenbeck, CEO of [InVision Software](#). “Almost all other products are based on a rigid set of rules which can only be modified to a limited extent by changing certain parameters. Many of the needs of international companies in particular cannot be met by a standard solution.”

About 40 new time management functions

With InVision Enterprise WFM 4.7, users can enter local laws as well as individual contract regulations into the system. Altogether, there are about 40 new functions for integrated [time management](#) that help users save time and calculate working times correctly. From the transfer, distribution, allocation, monitoring and approval of working times using time accounts to the preparation of this information for wages and salary accounting systems, the entire process can largely

be carried out automatically and smoothly using InVision’s software solution.

The integration of the time management process into an extensive [workforce management](#) system provides further advantages, including lowered administrative costs by using similar master data within the same system as well as improved staff planning via a detailed comparison of schedule and actual data. To continually optimize [staff planning](#), the times and activities scheduled in the Shift Center for each employee can be tested in real time against time punches or actual time worked. This makes it easy to quickly identify deviations that must be considered in order to attain better staff coverage for future scheduling.

Enhanced methods of optimizing staff planning

In addition to the new functions for time management, version 4.7 provides several enhancements for staff planning. Just one example is simplified scheduling across several time zones, specially developed for companies with facilities around the globe. Another brand-new function is the Absence Planner, facilitating long-term staff planning and providing a clear overview of all scheduled absences in the

selected monthly view of a given planning unit. It also provides an annual overview of the scheduled absences of an individual employee. Furthermore, there are now more ways to include employees in the scheduling process: Using [Infothek Interactive Schedule](#), they can now not only enter work time requests, planned absences and vacations but also general availability times which are automatically considered for staff planning, in accordance with defined scheduling rules.

