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JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2008

PREVENTING STAFF BURNOUT



CANADIAN DO NOT
CALL LEGISLATION
FREEING PROCESS
BOTTLENECKS

The silk purse side of telemarketing

While writing this issue's article on predictive diallers, I received a call on my home phone line from Gary at a window and door company in a neighbouring city, telling me there was a promotion going on and wondering if I was looking to replace any of my windows and doors. I'm not and I told him so. We wished each other a good day and hung up. The conversation took less than a minute. There had been no pause when I picked up the phone. No long script was read that I would have to be rude in order to stop it. The voice sounded like it might have been that of the company owner. I'll remember this company if I ever do decide to upgrade my windows.

While telemarketing done well can bring welcome news for the consumer, it is what gives this industry a bad image. Too often it's an irritant to the recipient of the call. That irritant could be a very expensive proposition for the caller if it means offending a customer or violating a do not call list restriction.

There's also the inside view to consider. An agent at an outsourcer recently com-

plained to me of the stress of responding to a screen pop up and launching into a conversation without knowing whether it

is an inbound call or one generated by an autodialler.

"Contact centres that have it right are able to notify the agent in advance and give a couple of minutes to get in that frame of mind; [they produce] a pop up on screen to notify and create a process for the agent," says Frank Muzzi, director, Strategic Customer Relations at Telus.

"I've never seen successfully taking inbound and outbound calls mixed up," he adds. "It would be way too difficult for the agent to handle unless it is follow up case management."

Demanding too much of your agents is also a major contributor to the industry's black eye. Check out the article this issue on agent burn out. Obviously one has to assess the needs of one's agents with the cost of meeting those needs, but time and again I've seen greed tip that balance in favour of keeping too tight a thumb on the human resources budget. It works for the short term but it erodes staff loyalty, morale and productivity.

As global competition and outbound restrictions come increasingly to bear, as they surely will, profit margins will be squeezed further. Some employers already being challenged will need to reassess the viability of their business. The survivors will make investments for the good of their staff, this industry and the folks interrupted at dinnertime.

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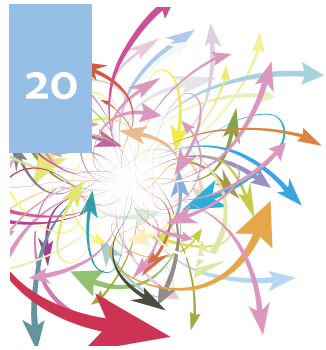
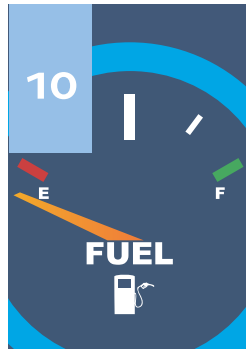
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Contact Centre Canada: new spring arrivals!

No, you are not reading an advertisement for the latest in fashion trends, but you can get equally excited about what is to come in 2008 with Contact Centre Canada, claims the sector council's new director of Marketing and Communications.. » BY SUSAN HILTON

As with many young organizations, Contact Centre Canada knew it was the right time to truly launch into the world of online communications. After all, we support close to 500 organizations in more than five industries across the nation whose success in customer relations relies solely on telecommunications. Now Contact Centre Canada is complementing our research efforts with a complete ecommunication tool that is sure to outlive even the best of the best.

We are using technology – the Internet – to leverage our communication to contact centres of all sizes. Contact Centre Canada's new web presence scheduled to launch early 2008 is designed to better serve our growing list of members – ensuring our plans for better business in the new year.

"Keeping on top of technological advances is considered a 'given' in today's marketplace and Contact Centre Canada is proving that we too are a player in a technologically-advanced world," says CEO Donna Miller.

The new website will undergo a complete makeover from how it looks and feels, to how it is navigated and how information is displayed. Advanced search functions will assist users based on their profile and their needs. Whether you are a small or medium-sized business looking for specialized e-training tools or a large organization interested in finding out the implications of labour market trends, Contact CentreCanada.ca will be your one-stop source.

Industry spoke, we listened

Our team of experts have been working tirelessly to bring our members (and future members) the most up-to-date and efficient

tools to help promote attraction, retention and development within this thriving industry. And we're using the web to deliver.

Hot topics opened the gates for some exciting projects that will be a showcase to the talents of so many industry leaders. In conjunction with the new website, Contact Centre Canada will be launching our National Occupational Standards and Essential Skills Profile – not to mention our highly-anticipated Employee Engagement report and online webinar tool.

Complementary to these, is a (Cost of) Turnover Calculator designed to provide quantitative data necessary to allow for a systematic method of capturing and consistently calculating the cost of turnover.

Additionally, Contact Centre Canada is in the planning stages of our HR Toolkit that is being designed to enhance employee relationship outcomes, improve attraction and retention efforts and thus raise the industry's competitive advantage.

Recently completed is our Technology Roadmap – a report illustrating how to gain improved alignment with government associations, education and research institutes, the vendor community and the businesses that are impacted by technology. All to ensure that the labour force has the required skill sets to support the emerging technological trends.

Part of our new year launch campaign is Contact Centre Canada's Labour Market Implications report which will provide insight into assessing the labour force implications of offshoring, new technologies and new legislation.

What you can expect

These complete findings and invaluable tools



will be readily available through the new website and will also help leverage partner and industry knowledge to further the industry's presence across Canada. Through newsletters and RSS feeds, the website will engage members to provide feedback, opinions, submit success stories, and share resources and best practices. If this doesn't peak your interest, keep reading.

In 2008, also watch for Contact Centre Canada's travelling road show – personal and highly focussed workshops designed to illustrate industry communication and sharing of best practices. From these workshops, Contact Centre Canada plans to exemplify a sense of community amongst industry leaders and, in turn, help bridge the distance between employers and the call centre workforce.

Become part of the excitement and benefit. Become a Contact Centre Canada member now and have access to invaluable reports and HR products that will help strengthen your team – your business. There's never been a better time to become a member and membership is easy. Just visit our new site and enjoy the resources that await you.

Susan Hilton can be reached at susanh@contactcentre.ca.

**GROUNDBREAKING
CUSTOMER SERVICE WINS
CIPA TOP HONOURS**



Toyota CIO Hao Tien, centre, holds top CIPA prize presented by CGI senior vice-president Doug McCuaig, left, and CIPA president and CEO Norm Kirkpatrick. Photo: CIPA

Improving service to customers won a slew of companies recognition at the 2007 Canadian Information Productivity Awards (CIPA), an annual showcase for Canadian IT and innovation.

Sharing knowledge of its customers' needs and experiences among company stakeholders earned Toyota Canada Inc. the Diamond Award, the top 2007 CIPA honour in the for-profit category.

BMO Financial Group won gold in the Customer Centricity Category for its CustomerConnect program.

RBC Financial Group's use of virtual agents – the first major financial institution in North America to do so – won it a silver award in the Customer Centricity Category.

National Bank of Canada earned silver in the Organizational Transformation Category for a sales management application which produced big gains at a low cost.

The awards were presented Nov. 14, 2007, at the fifteenth annual CIPA gala held at the Westin Hotel conference centre in Toronto. We'll detail these award winners and their winning ways in upcoming issues.

CIPA is supported by managing sponsor CGI Group Inc. and diamond sponsors CA Canada and Hewlett-Packard (Canada) Co. Research partner is IDC Canada and allied technology associations include CATA, CHITTA, CIPS, COACH, CME, FiQ, ITAC and others.

**CMA FEELS HEAT FROM
AGENTS' MISTAKE**

While the Canadian Marketing Association (CMA) does offer a free Do Not Contact program for consumers to register their address and phone number to stop receiving marketing offers from CMA member companies, the Association is asking its members to advise their front-line customer sales and telemarketing representatives that the Association

does not own or manage consumer marketing lists. The CMA in November released a bulletin about members misrepresenting its do not call service.

"Contact centre representatives at several CMA Member organizations are advising consumers that CMA is the source of their marketing lists," reads the notice. "As a result, consumers are being mistakenly told to

see **readerboard** page 6



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contact the Association to have their names removed from all marketing lists. CMA has received many irate calls, some involving threats, from frustrated consumers.

"It is important that consumers understand that CMA does not own, compile, prepare or rent marketing lists of consumer names, addresses or phone numbers," the notice stresses. "Rather, the Association only operates a free consumer service that enables individuals to have their name, address and phone number removed from lists held by CMA Member organizations.

"The Association's Code of Ethics requires that all members must use the CMA do not call list to scrub any telephone, fax and mail marketing lists they are using to remove the contact information of consumers registered with the CMA service (except for existing customers/donors)," the bulletin explains. "CMA members are also responsible for maintaining their own suppression lists to accommodate requests from existing customers or non-customers who want to stop receiving marketing offers from that specific organization."

CMA members are instructed to maintain their own internal do not contact suppression lists and also ensure that they or any third parties working on their behalf are using the CMA Do Not Contact Service in accordance with the Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.



TRANSWORKS AND MINACS UNVEIL ADITYA BIRLA MINACS

Toronto-based TransWorks and Minacs announced the renaming of their combined entity as Aditya Birla Minacs, a subsidiary of Aditya Birla Nuvo of Bangalore, India, on Dec. 3, 2007. The announcement coincided with the launch of a new website at www.minacs.adityabirla.com to reflect the company's new identity and multinational footprint.

"The new identity leverages both the Aditya Birla and Minacs brands and creates a unique, yet recognizable symbol," noted Dev Bhattacharya, managing director, Aditya Birla Minacs. "We have woven our capabilities into a single brand with one goal — to set the industry benchmark in the global business process outsourcing arena.

"We have already seen significant gains globally over the past few months through our strong customer relationships and the 'same-shore/nearshore' capability that we today possess," he added. "The new brand will continue to reiterate our commitment to clients and employees."

The company also reported that it will introduce new services intended to add value and identify ways to improve customers' businesses. The company boasts a global presence with 33 centres. The new logo for Aditya Birla Minacs leverages Minacs' 25 year history Minacs in North American and European target markets and carries the brand equity of the US\$24 billion Aditya Birla Group.

In June 2006, TransWorks acquired Minacs, Canada's leading business process outsourcing company. As Aditya Birla Minacs, the company employs over 11,000 employees across 33 facilities in Canada, Germany, Hungary, India, United Kingdom, United States and Philippines and provides services in 28 languages. Customers include Global 1000 automotive, financial services, technology and telecom companies. The company is certified to the COPC-2000, ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 27001 Standards.

CAM-X WINNERS RELISH THEIR RECOGNITION

Winnipeg, MB-based AnswerNet IMI, an AnswerNet Network company, reports that it earned two of the Canadian telemessaging industry's most prestigious awards. The company was recognized by the Canadian Call Management Association (CAM-X) for two of its top honours: 2007 Award of Excellence, which the company has won for a third consecutive year, and the Call Centre Award of Distinction.

AnswerNet IMI was recognized for the 2007 Award of Excellence by having aced a "mystery caller" program that tested the company on the quality of its telephone agents. The Canadian trade association

CAM-X judges message services by evaluating criteria such as courtesy, response time, accuracy and overall service. AnswerNet received scores of 80 per cent or higher in every tested category.

24-7 INtouch, a Toronto-based multi-channel contact centre outsourcer, also announces that it earned the CAM-X 2007 Award of Distinction for its sixth consecutive year.

The Call Centre Award of Distinction was created in response to requests by call centres for a tool that can measure the skills of their professional call centre agents. After six months of testing, an independent panel of judges scores call-handling skills for "enhanced service" applications, focusing attention on CRM, courtesy, etiquette, the use of proper call techniques, response time and accuracy; the cornerstones of the Call Management Industry.

"CAM-X is important to our industry, as they help set quality standards and expectations among call centres," notes Greg Fettes, 24-7 INtouch president and CEO. "Being recognized for the sixth consecutive year displays our consistency and commitment to quality and reliability. We strive to maintain this standard as we grow, while constantly looking for ways to improve."

AnswerNet IMI views the Call Centre Award of Distinction as also recognizing the firm's handling of more complex call centre applications such as e-commerce and call flow scripting. Claiming to be the world's largest telemessaging firm, the AnswerNet Network provides inbound, outbound and e-bound contact centre and fulfillment services out of more than 50 contact centres in North America for a client base of over 35,000.

MILLENNIUM CARE INC. ENDORSES BELL CANADA, AVAYA MANAGED OFFERING

Millennium Care Inc., a Canadian-based, global help desk out-tasking organization with delivery centres in Victoria, BC, Toronto, ON and Bombay, India, serves more than 200,000 IT activities per month originating in 80 countries worldwide with over 25,000 logins per month from end users and I.T. workers around the world. These activities include a substantial range of ITIL based process tasks, including incident, problem

and change. The company recently became the first customer of the newly launched Bell Managed Solutions to establish a virtual contact centre.

"Bell's turnkey contact centre solution really answered our call," noted Doug LaRose, vice-president of operations for MillenniumCare, the first Bell Managed Solutions customer to establish a virtual contact centre at the launch of the new product in the fall 2007. "The fact that it's fully managed and owned by Bell helps us lower our total cost of delivery, and the powerful functionality of the Avaya platform keeps us competitive within our target markets. The beauty of the solution is that we don't have to finance major up-front capital investments or manage the contact centre equipment. Best of all, we can incrementally scale our requirements and costs as we expand our business, that in the end, means our team can focus on our core business of delivering exceptional help desk services."

Bell Canada and Avaya teamed up on the turnkey multimedia contact centre solution. Available to Bell Managed Solutions customers throughout Canada, the fully managed solution is described as a cost-effective way to implement sophisticated multimedia capabilities so that end customers can choose a variety of communication vehicles to interact with help desk service support, including fax, self-serve voice response, e-mail, voice, web chat and web-live voice. Businesses can now take advantage of state-of-the-art routing, reporting and management capabilities for all these types of customer service interactions. The multimedia contact centre solution delivers a fully managed, customized solution that is ideally suited for enterprise customers with 35 to 300 contact centre agents. Pricing

is structured on a predictable per-agent basis each month, with no initial capital outlay required. Any technology upgrades to the contact centre are provided by Bell, as the assets are not owned by the enterprise.

Described as network-based and fully managed from start to finish, Bell Managed Solutions offers e-business solutions, network management and outsourcing, security and data integrity, converged desktop communications and a range of related professional services. The new offering integrates Avaya Enterprise Class Internet Protocol Solutions (ECLIPS) and Avaya Multimedia Contact Centre software with Bell Canada's IP/broadband network.

AVAYA URGES MARRYING TELEPHONY WITH BUSINESS PROCESSES

Contact centres are the number one focus for Avaya in 2008, according to Mario Belanger, president of Avaya Canada Corp. At a media and analyst event in December, he claimed Info-Tech Research Group reports that Avaya has a 22 per cent market share lead in the contact centre space.

"We have the who's who of customers," he told *Contact Management* magazine. Many of these are financial institutions looking to expand, he added. He noted that Avaya's Intelligent Communications product suite and services enable companies to consolidate or grow their contact centre operations. The technology also provides business continuity support. He recalled that at the time of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SAR) outbreak in Toronto in 2003, an Avaya customer had one suspected infection which meant 300 people could not work

from the office. Now the technology enables remote access so, "for example, if there is a snowstorm in the Maritimes and the agent can't make it to the office," the work can be continued from accessible computers.

He sees the move from a publicly traded and monitored company to a private one as "refreshing." He noted that having to weigh actions according to whether or not the market would approve stops a public company from overspending in one financial quarter even though it might be in the best interest in the long run to do so.

Being a private company "will enable us to research and develop best of class solutions and make decisions that will favourably impact the long run," he said. "We will still have the financial discipline but not being under the microscope we can pull the curtain [closed] and rearrange the set." Being a private company will "help us accelerate what we were doing," he stressed.

Already, the company has gone far beyond offering "the PBX server of old," he said, noting that the company now "marries telephony with business processes." The key benefit to that is the removal of "human latency" out of business processes so companies can better serve customers.

It is "communications at the speed of business without breaking stride," said Allan Mendelsohn, Avaya's senior manager, Unified Communications Product Marketing. He defined Avaya's unified communications offering as "orchestrated communication and collaboration across locations, time and medium to accelerate business results. It gives the ability to get to the right person at the right time to collapse days of telephone tag

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and email exchanges.”

In the contact centre environment, that can mean quickly and reliably connecting the right agents with the right customers. That is a key benefit cited by Chubb Insurance Company of Canada, a Toronto-based property and casualty insurer with offices in Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver who worked with Avaya business partner Unity

Telecom of Newmarket, ON. Watch for details in an upcoming issue.

One of the past year highlights Belanger cited was Bell Canada standardizing on Avaya’s IP communication product line. The standardization is said to allow Bell Canada to facilitate the migration of its customers who currently use Avaya Definity Servers, Intuity Audix or Octel 250/350 voice and messaging platforms to Avaya IP-based

communications solutions, which include telephony, messaging, conferencing, video and collaboration that are accessible across a variety of devices.

MICROSOFT UNWRAPS NEXT CRM SOFTWARE VERSION

The new version of Microsoft Dynamics CRM, formerly code-named “Titan,” at press time was to be launched Jan. 30, 2008 in Vancouver, BC, Feb. 6 in Toronto, ON, Feb. 13 in Montreal, QC, and in Ottawa, Winnipeg, Halifax, Calgary and Edmonton during March and April.

The new version is offered under two product names: Microsoft Dynamics CRM 4.0 for on-premise and partner-hosted deployments and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Live for Microsoft-hosted deployment.

“Because Microsoft Dynamics CRM uses a single unified code base for both on-premise and on-demand deployments, customers can choose the right deployment model for their specific business and IT needs and change their deployment model over time if their needs or preferences change,” a news release attributes to Frank Falcone, CRM product manager, Microsoft Canada. “This new release further enables us to deliver on Microsoft’s software plus services strategy and provide our CRM solutions with a great user experience.”

Microsoft lists significant benefits and capabilities of this new release as including:

- An advanced multi-tenant architecture that supports multiple customers per server;
- Extended global capabilities including user choice of more than 25 languages and pervasive support for multiple currencies;
- New business intelligence capabilities including cross-entity views and an end-user ad hoc reporting wizard;
- Advanced business process automation based on Microsoft Windows Workflow; and
- New collaboration capabilities with Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 including real-time presence indicators within the CRM application.

The new release of Microsoft Dynamics CRM has been in extensive use over the past year by more than 600 partners around the world and more than 100 early access customers representing a broad range of



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Microsoft Dynamics CRM 4.0 will be available worldwide in more than 25 languages. The new Microsoft Dynamics Live CRM service is offered only in the United States and Canada.

This product launch is on the heels of the Office Communications Server 2007 unveiled last October amid claims of "taking the first step towards significantly reducing the cost of the average Voice over IP (VoIP) communication system by half." The software suite is said to "bring together the phone, e-mail, instant messaging and video for a consistent user experience."

By combining voice mail, e-mail, phone and video with the power of "presence", the Microsoft unified communications solutions are said to offer users a single point of contact that simplifies connectivity for Canadian workers.

The suite of unified communications products includes software for delivering VoIP, video, instant messaging, conferencing and presence within applications such as Microsoft Office and the newly released Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Client software for phone, instant messaging and video communications that works across the PC, mobile phone and Web-browser; Microsoft Office Live Meeting for conferencing from any computer; and Microsoft RoundTable conferencing phone with a 360-degree camera are also part of the suite. Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 Quality of Experience Monitoring Server as a tool to monitor voice and video quality and troubleshoot performance issues.

For details on the launch events or product, see www.microsoft.ca.

SCRIPTING SOFTWARE LAUNCHED IN CANADA

Contact centre scripting software that facilitates building complex scripts without requiring extensive information technology (IT) knowledge is being introduced to Canada early this year.

Team Knowledge, makers of TK Dialogs scripting solutions for contact centres, is partnering with Burlington, ON-based Mercer-MacKay Solutions to bring their scripting software to Canada.

TK Dialogs, successfully implemented throughout Europe and in South America,

helps centres rapidly introduce new and even complex scripts for agents to follow, capture the feedback information and populate the corporate CRM or other databases easily – and without involvement from IT. Further, the scripts can be offered over the web for improved customer self service.

"We are excited about working with TK Dialogs," said Gail Mercer-MacKay, president of Mercer-MacKay Solutions. "We have found very few scripting solutions in the past that provide call centre management the opportunity to build complex scripts without requiring deep technical knowledge."

In addition to guiding users through an approved script, organizations are able to capture data in the appropriate fields. This normalizes data and drives meaningful business intelligence.

"TK Dialogs helps non-technical staff create scripts using a flow-chart tool which is simple to use and navigate," said Joe Cassidy, Director of Team Knowledge. "In addition to building scripts, TK Dialogs also supports accessing other systems and creating information requests such as application forms, letters, etc."

Debuting at the Microsoft Canadian CRM Launch, the software can be tried live at:

Vancouver's Vancity Theatre on Jan. 30, 2008; the Toronto Metro Convention Centre on Feb. 6, 2008; and Montreal's Delta Centre-Ville on Feb. 13, 2008. (To register for any of these events, visit www.microsoft.com/canada/events/.)

For further information on these events or the TK Dialogs solution, contact Gail Mercer-MacKay at 905-635-6714.

CALABRIO OFFERS UPGRADES FOR IP-BASED CENTRES

Calabrio, Inc. in October released its Calabrio Quality Management and Calabrio Workforce Management software. The enhancements are said to reduce server hardware, database licensing and client software requirements, decreasing the time and cost associated with deploying and managing a workforce optimization solution.

The products described as built from the ground up to be simple to deploy, learn and use in virtual, IP-based call centres, whether they have a small number of agents or thousands.

"Our partners, prospects and customers consistently tell us that usability and opera-

tional ease are critical factors when selecting a software solution," said Paul Lidsky, president and CEO of Calabrio, Inc.

Calabrio claims that with its Quality Management 2.4, voice and screen recording can now be hosted on a single server. The new architecture provides an initial investment savings for Calabrio customers, as well as less hardware and system software to support. Rather than purchasing, managing and maintaining multiple servers to support voice and screen recordings, customers will be able to use a single server for every 300 agents simultaneously logged into the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD).

Calabrio Workforce Management 8.1 is said to provide full browser-based access to all product features, enabling the contact centre to be managed from anywhere in the world. Centre managers can generate forecasts and schedules, while supervisors get a single view of all contact centre KPIs. Intervention tools enable contact centre managers to be proactive. From anywhere, contact centre managers can track actual customer service levels and call volumes to optimize staffing while improving customer satisfaction.

Workforce Management 8.1 lets agents view schedules, request vacations and trade shifts at work, at home or at any contact centre virtual location. They can monitor their own productivity indicators on a daily basis to keep their performance on track.

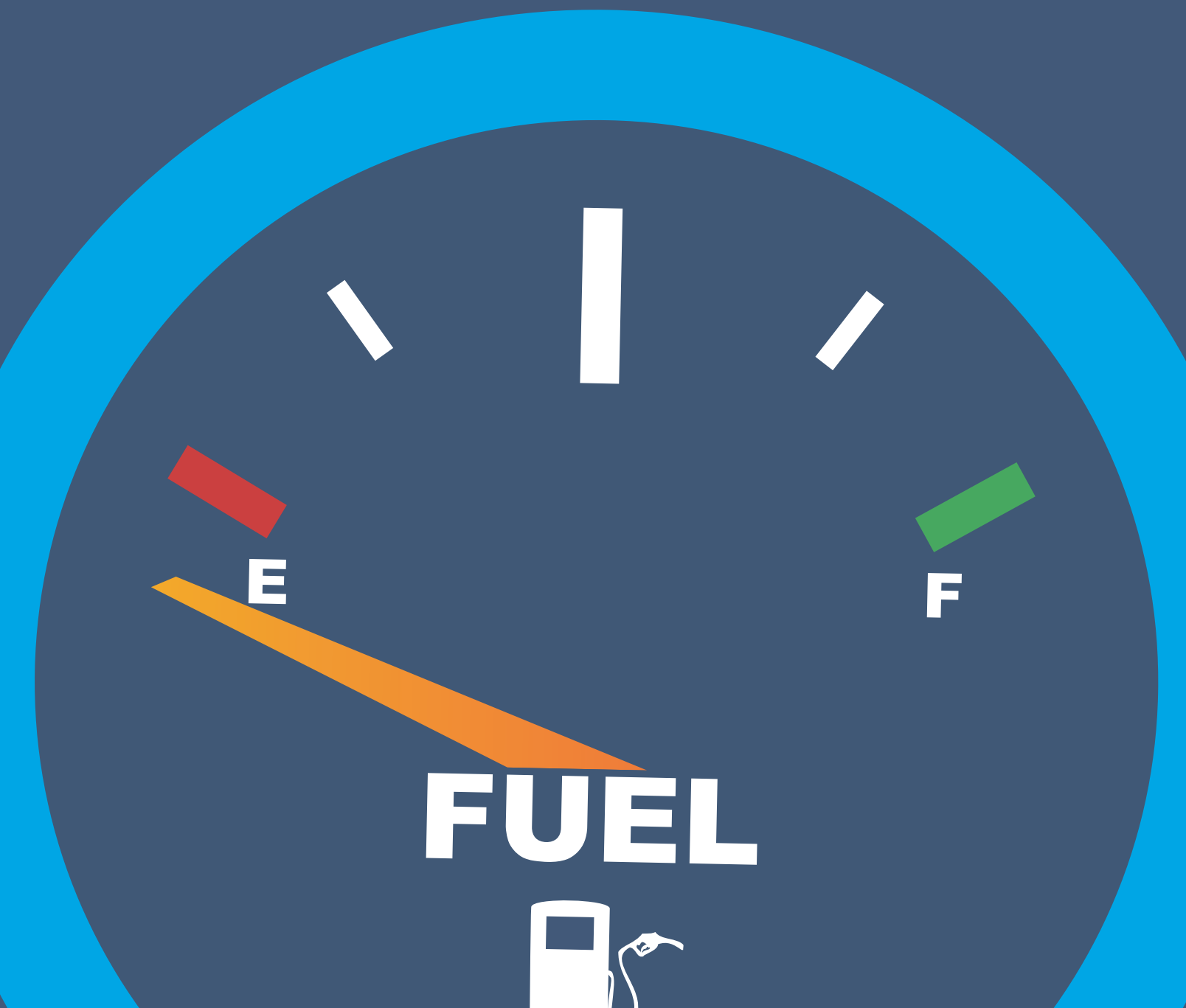
Commenting on Calabrio being spun off Spanlink Communication last fall, Tim Kraskey, vice-president, Calabrio's Marketing & Business Development, told Contact Management: "Spanlink is a solutions provider with a different business model than a company building software." He said since being acquired by Spanlink, Calabrio has grown both in employee count and product base. "There were 20 employees when Spanlink took over and there are 120 today. Now Calabrio Canada can bring more applications – including quality management, performance management and business intelligence – beyond the workforce management."

The "new" company starts out with about 500,000 installed desktops and will maintain the OEM relationship with Cisco. The company headquarters will remain the Spanlink Minneapolis, MN, base, but Montreal will be the R&D and service centre for the whole Calabrio corporation, said Kraskey.

COUNTERING AGENT BURNOUT

Do you have conflict in your contact centre? High absenteeism or attrition? An unexplainable drop in productivity or attendance? Negativism and cynicism towards the organization? All this could be a result of agent burnout.

» BY TERRY PRUNER



Agent burnout is a costly problem for contact centres and not one of the simpler “people” related problems to resolve. In order to discuss strategies for managing agent burnout, we first need to agree on what it is and identify the possible root causes.

Burnout can be defined as a physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive stress, or stress extended over a period of time. Unlike stress, it creates emotional damage rather than physical damage and, as a result, is much more difficult to identify. It is usually realized by the individual feeling overwhelmed, or stressed out and unable to meet the demands of everyday life. Over time, stress builds or high levels of stress are maintained and a person begins to lose interest in tasks or goals that had previously been highly motivating. Individuals begin to feel tired, often resulting in lost productivity because they just “don’t have the energy.” A person may be irritable or edgy, or resort to unhealthy distractions like alcohol or drugs. As it progresses, burnout can create feelings of cynicism and resentment, powerlessness, hopelessness or despair.

These characteristics are similar to behaviours found in people who suffer from mild to severe forms of depression. Like these illnesses, burnout can threaten a person’s job, other relationships and create serious health issues.

Now consider areas where burnout can develop in an otherwise healthy contact centre agent. What is it in these workplaces that cause so much continuous unrelenting stress that causes our people to burnout so quickly? Just ask any contact centre manager to spend a day or two sitting in the centre and observing agent behaviours and he or she will see the telltale signs of burnout at varying stages.

Of course, contact centre agents can have different roles and responsibilities – customer service representatives, inside telephone sales, outside telephone sales or technical support. A first line of support or managing escalated calls requiring more complex problem solving. Handling contacts regarding failure of a product or delivery of a service. Possible life or death consequences, as in a pharmaceutical or 911 contact centre. But, there are a number of manageable factors common to most

contact centres that we should consider as leading to, or resulting in agent burnout. Consider some of the following factors in your contact centre.

Manageable contributors to agent burnout

» Climate and values. This includes both the physical and emotional climate. Are the facilities clean with lots of natural light? Is there adequate workspace? Are chairs and workstations ergonomically sound? One way you can tell if people are enjoying their work is by the way they talk to customers and each other. Can you feel tension and unresolved conflict?

Company values can also have a significant impact on climate in either a positive or negative manner. Most companies have established “values” as part of their organizations strategy but then stop short of ensuring that values are regularly demonstrated in everyday decision making. In most cases these values, in fact, represent not only important corporate beliefs, but personal beliefs that agents may have considered as reasons for working for the company. Values like respect, goal focus, continuous learning or customer commitment, if not consistently demonstrated by management, can result in a loss of company credibility and increased agent cynicism. This scenario can lead to an agent feeling helpless, frustration and stress, compromising their own personal values or seeing little hope for attaining their own personal goals or succession. We also need to be careful that we don’t compromise our agents’ basic needs of safety, security, including financial security, and self esteem.

» Work is too challenging or unchallenging. It’s simply human nature that most of us want to do well at work and experience success, accomplishment and appreciation. If employees are faced with unattainable goals, they will typically attempt to attain them anyway. Over time however, unattainable goals will become frustrating and pointless. Agents will either stop trying to attain them or will begin to demonstrate some of the common signs of burnout: fatigue, absenteeism, loss of interest, etc. A similar problem is demonstrated if the work isn’t challenging enough. Consider

that most contact centre positions are entry level jobs which people are attracted to as a route into an industry or organization, a career transition, a part-time second income, or simply a first job for a recent graduate. In other words, contact centre agents are typically intelligent, educated and may have considerable experience. When placed into a role where they must constantly conduct the same repetitive tasks or basic call types, they get bored and restless and begin to feel that their work is pointless, leading nowhere or accomplishing nothing. This dynamic can result from companies not recognizing the point at which basic repetitive tasks should be offloaded to automation like the web or IVR.

» Unclear roles or direction. Frustration and stress can be created in circumstances where agents don’t have clear job descriptions or accountabilities, or are asked to perform non core tasks under the guise of training or succession planning. Project work is fine, but managers get into trouble when they assign permanent non-core duties for an agent to perform regularly, with the belief that it is contributing to their succession plan. In most cases it just represents extra work for which they receive no recognition or compensation. This dynamic commonly affects agents with a longer tenure who are seeking additional responsibilities but have no desire or opportunity to move to the next level. Another challenge in this area is when an agent reports to multiple supervisors or lateral roles within the hierarchy like quality coaches. The agent can feel powerless or overwhelmed when receiving direction, in some cases conflicting, from more than one boss

» Change management. Contact centres experience plenty of change, probably more than any other department in the organization. This change is typically the result of two driving departments: information technology (IT) and marketing. When change is managed well, it can create excitement. But when managed poorly, it creates stress for everyone! IT has its agenda of managing support costs and implementing new organization and customer serving technologies. As we have all experienced,

see **agent health** page 12

from agent health page 11

these technologies often don't initially work the way we or IT expect. This can negatively impact the contact centre or agent performance, or create extra work and stress explaining problems to customers.

Marketing, on the other hand, is all about getting more customers, share of wallet, market share, touch points. This can be problematic as the marketing department often doesn't understand the complexities or impact on customer service from campaigns which, when poorly communicated or poorly integrated into contact centre processes, can result in agents being uninformed about new campaigns or initiatives.

Poor communication, however, is not limited to marketing or IT, as they have the added requirement of channelling their direction through the people and process of the contact centre itself. This is where poor communications comes home to supervisors, team leaders or managers who haven't documented all their call processes or operational processes. Alternatively, these centre leaders may take shortcuts in managing change by "firing out" e-mail messages instead of taking the time to follow some people-friendly change management best practices. Furthermore, the absence of regular processes can leave agents on their own to guess how situations with customers should be handled, leaving them with the risk of making wrong decisions and creating inconsistencies in customer handling strategies.

» Stage of Life or Personal Life. This is where things get really tricky. We typically don't control, nor have the desire to control, what happens with our agents outside of work. However, in the part of their lives that we don't manage, events can take place that can have serious impact on their work life. These events may vary from family or relationship crises, to health problems or substance abuse. Not recognizing the signs of burnout in these agents can result in the loss of an otherwise well-trained and valuable employee, who is just navigating their way through a complex life situation.

» General "time starvation" in life overall and other non work-related stresses

Reducing stress, improving work life quality

Once we understand the causes and have a sense of how to recognize the symptoms, the good news is that there is plenty we can do about it.

Climate can be positively impacted in a number of ways. Just acknowledging to agents that they play an important and often stressful role in the organization is a good start. A good next step is to look at front line leadership. Working with customers requires people and working with people requires leadership skills. Front line managers don't have a lot of experience with leadership. Sending supervisors to leadership skills training can have a huge impact on creating a positive and energized workplace.

Once trained, supervisors can work with you on some of the following strategies.

» Entrench company goals and values into decision making, compensation and succession planning. Create a climate where agents participate in the goal setting process. Encourage and act upon creativity and new ideas.

» Develop workplace improvement initiatives. Periodically review the physical workplace in relation to leading practices.

» Develop motivating and fun performance incentive programs. This is outside of compensation and reward. They don't need to be costly but they are most effective when they are modified regularly.

» Review QA, coaching and mentoring programs and ensure they have a positive developmental focus. Develop position relevant scorecards.

» Create teamwork activities, discussion groups, fitness programs. Have offsite social activities so agents can build camaraderie and burn off steam!

» Create communication and conflict resolution protocols and ensure that time is made for face to face communication. Ensure that supervisors are participating more than observing. Set clear standards

for duties and performance but communicate positively and productively.

» Implement or refine contact centre or enterprise change management processes. Ensure that marketing and IT are familiar with contact centre processes along with capabilities and limitations.

» Document all call processes and operational processes.

» Create job rotations through skill sets or specialist roles.

» Clarify roles, accountabilities, priorities and opportunities. Define competencies and train to meet standards. Include training in how to manage difficult customers, stress and time management.

» Periodically have someone from outside "the fishbowl" take a look at your operations to provide a unique perspective on leading practices from outside the organization.

Burnout takes effect over time and is difficult to fight once you're in the middle of it. Being proactive about identifying sources of stress and taking action will save you the cost of attrition and likely improve productivity. As an added bonus, you will no doubt earn some loyal contact centre agents in the process!

Resources on employee burnout and what you can do about it:

Preventing Burnout In Your Staff And Yourself: A Survival Guide For Human Services Supervisors; by Rebekah L. Dorman; published by CWLA Press;

Finding Your Smile Again: A Child Care Professional's Guide to Reducing Stress and Avoiding Burnout; by Jeff A. Johnson; published by Redleaf Press;

Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency, by Tom Demarc; published by Broadway Books.

www.coping.org;
www.stressdoc.com;
www.helpguide.org

Terry Pruner, president of the consulting firm CRM Connections Inc., teaches contact centre management and organizational behaviour for the Centre for Financial Services in the Faculty of Business at Seneca College.

FIVE TIPS FOR ENGAGING

GEN X & Y TALENT

One of the most pressing concerns amongst managers these days is employee retention. Unlike previous generations, Generations X and Y have developed a bad reputation for being disloyal. This, of course, is not the truth, but in reality, these generations are accustomed to instant gratification, which they also apply to career development, and hold vastly different values compared to older generations. » BY JACQUES GAUMOND

Numerous studies have stated that different approaches need to be applied to these “all about me” generations to keep them as engaged employees. The following tips are a guide to help you assess and retain the next generation of talent.

1. Ask yourself the tough questions

Managing talent is one of the top priorities of CEOs, but often also the most overlooked. In order to solve your retention issues, you must first look inside your organization and ask yourself some introspective questions, such as: “Why would people want to work for my company instead of the competition? Why would they want to stay here? What would they need in order to take part in our collective journey?” If you are not clear about the answers, how can your employees be? While HR can help coach managers on their responsibilities, the ultimate responsibility for talent management lies in your hands.

2. Make your talent pool your most important asset

No business can exist without talent. According to a recent study conducted by McKinsey & Co., most CEOs considered their talent pool to be their most important asset, but very few acted accordingly to support this claim. Not only is it important that you understand the value of your employees, but your employees must also understand their own value. The new generation of employees needs to feel that their jobs have meaning, and they like to see self-improvement at the end of the day. Ensuring that employees are familiar with the major strategic business objectives can help employees feel valued within your organization.

3. Develop your leadership skills

According to a recent Gallup poll, employees rated their boss’ ability to motivate and develop his/her team higher in importance in comparison to traditional criteria like salary, benefits and other financial incentives. The new generation of employees is looking for better leadership, not better pay. They are looking for, and value, a manager who is an advisor, a catalyst for team talent development and a leader who gives frequent feedback and actively supports employee training. Generations X and Y also value managers who can think globally, appreciate cultural diversity and use new technology. In order to manage the new generation, you must understand their thinking, inspire them and help them grow.

4. Collaborate with employees in the decision-making process

The latest generation of employees has become accustomed to being included in the decision-making process. The old hierarchical workplace and authoritarian managers no longer suit these employees who have been used to sharing the leadership role since an early age. Employers that are able to retain the best and brightest talent are those that listen to employees and consider their wants and needs when developing practices.

5. Communicate with them in a language they’re familiar with

When it comes to training and development, managers must communicate with their employees in a language they understand. While traditional training programs usually involve time-consuming and expensive classroom training, these training methods may seem outdated to today’s tech-savvy employees. Most of the younger generation has grown up with the Internet and are part of the electronic

and network age, so using training methods like eLearning that are comfortable to your younger generation will help them feel valued and engaged and will help you meet your business objectives at the same time.

Jacques Gaumond is vice-president of sales and marketing at Technomedia Training Inc. www.technomedia.ca.





CANADA'S DNC LIST TO BE IMPLEMENTED THIS YEAR

» BY SUSAN MACLEAN

Progress is being made on Canada's national Do Not Call (DNC) list with the latest estimate for it to be implemented as early as this summer. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) on Dec. 21, 2007, announced that it had awarded a five-year contract to Bell Canada to operate the DNC list. The CRTC reported that Bell Canada was the only bidder that was compliant with the requirements of the Request for Proposal.

Bell Canada will be responsible for accepting the numbers from registering consumers, making up-to-date versions of the list available to telemarketers and charging a fee to do so, and receiving consumer complaints about telemarketing calls, reveals Bell Canada spokesperson Jacqueline Michelis.

"We're happy to have won it and to be doing it," says Michelis, regarding the company's selection as operator. "It is a business opportunity for us and we feel we have expertise in that

area. We have maintained our own do not call list for more than 10 years and have certainly been compliant with customers' requests. We also voluntarily subscribe to CMA's do not call list."

Bell Canada will operate Canada's national DNC list using the fees that telemarketers will pay to subscribe to the list. That fee structure has yet to be determined but will include an initial subscription fee. Michelis expects the fee structure will be in place before this summer.

She says that Bell Canada as operator will propose a rate which will be up to the CRTC to approve. She agreed that to some extent they will be looking to the United States as an example.

With the possible penalty as much as \$15,000 per violation, outbound calls will need to be closely monitored for compliance with the DNC legislation.

The Bell Canada/CRTC contract stipulates that the list should be launched by September

30, 2008. "It's a fairly compact time frame," says Michelis. Given that "there's quite a bit of work to be done between now and then," she does not anticipate a launch significantly before that date. However, she recommends companies prepare and points out that Bell Canada has resources designed to help customers comply with the rules.

While the CRTC web site is a definitive source on all compliance requirements, Bell Canada is among the companies offering online a DNC needs assessment and timeline guidelines. This 24-question needs assessment is intended to highlight how various parts of an organization will need to prepare for the changes required by the DNC legislation, and the timelines to be expected for such preparations. It also includes a general timeline of the key milestones involved in getting ready.

*Details are at www.bell.ca/donotcallassessment.
The CRTC information is at www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Decisions/2007/dt2007-48.htm.*

Other nations' DNC efforts shed light on impact here

Here are some details about Canada's national DNC list to take effect this fall and a look at other jurisdictions by comparison. >> BY EDWARD SOORANY

Since its inception in 2003, more than 145 million phone numbers were added to the American DNC registry. This was in addition to the roughly 40 states that already enacted their own DNC laws. Similarly, the United Kingdom's "Telephone Preference Service" has registered more than 60 per cent of U.K. households and more than 55 per cent of businesses. Australia launched its own DNC List, the "Do Not Call Register," in May 2007, and close to two million residents signed up their phone numbers.

Once the DNC list goes into effect, Canadian telemarketers will only be permitted to make calls between 9:00 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. on weekdays, and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekends. In addition to similar restrictions in the U.S., many states have outlawed 'dinner time' calling. Canadians wishing to add (or remove) their numbers to the DNC list will be able to do so for free.

Telemarketers who wish to access the DNC list will need to pay subscription fees directly to the operator of the DNC list, the amount of which remains to be determined. But if it's anywhere close to the subscription fees charged in other countries, direct marketers should be prepared to cough up some cash.

Companies that wish to access the American DNC registry are provided a subscription account number, or SAN. The first five area codes can be downloaded for free. Each additional area code incurs an annual fee of US\$62, up to a maximum annual fee of US\$17,050 for the entire database.

In the U.K, access to the DNC registry can cost up to GBP2,440, while in Australia it can be up to AUD\$80,000.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the governmental body that regulates the Registry there, has already managed to acquire considerable fine revenues from its enforcement efforts. During the last four years, the FTC has launched more than two dozen investigations into DNC violations, generating millions of dollars in penalties, plus additional amounts

that have been already collected for consumer compensation.

This is not surprising considering that each violation carries a fine of up to US\$11,000 and that each call could be considered a separate violation. By contrast, violating DNC law in the U.K. can result in a fine of GBP5,000 per violation, while in Australia penalties can exceed AUD\$1 million.

In Canada, calling a phone number that was registered at least 31 days prior will carry a per violation fine of up to \$1,500 for individuals and up to \$15,000 for companies. A consumer complaint must be made within 14 days of receiving the unsolicited call. The CRTC will examine a number of variables to determine if a notice of violation is warranted and what fine exactly should be imposed.

Once a consumer complaint is made, the CRTC will decide whether or not to conduct an investigation. If it does so, any Notice of Violation and imposed fines will be based upon:

- the seriousness of the violation;
- the number and frequency of received complaints;
- any previous violation history;
- the relative disincentive of the fine;
- the potential for repeat offences in the future.

Anyone served with a Notice of Violation will have the opportunity to contest before any fines are administered. The monies collected from all fines will be paid directly to the Government of Canada, rather than be used to cover any operating expenses associated with the subscription fee-driven DNC list service. No collected monies will be paid to the CRTC or DNC list operator. Certain callers will also be exempt.

Companies and individuals may still call phone numbers on the national DNC list provided that the calls are made from or on behalf of:

- Political parties and their nomination contestants and candidates;

- Registered charities;
- Polling firms;
- Newspaper Subscriptions;
- Organizations that already have an existing relationship with the consumer.

Just as in the U.S. and Australia, business to business (B2B) calls in Canada will be exempt from the DNC list. Companies making B2B calls will still be expected to maintain their own internal DNC list, as well as respect the wishes of anyone wishing to be removed from a list.

By contrast, the U.K. launched a Corporate Telephone Preference Service (CTPS) in 2004 that gave businesses the opportunity to opt-out of receiving unsolicited sales and marketing calls altogether. Even schools, government agencies, and hospitals can register their business lines on the CTPS DNC list.

When the American DNC list was first created, the registry was to keep phone numbers for five years, after which consumers were required to enrol again. With more than 75 per cent of American adults currently registered according to the FTC's web site, it is not surprising that committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate have passed bills to make the DNC list permanent. On the other hand, the CRTC will require that consumers re-register their phone numbers every three years.

The impact of the DNC registry on U.S. businesses is also becoming apparent. In a recent US study entitled "US Contact Centre Operational Review 2007," more than 40 per cent of those surveyed indicated reduced outbound calling since the DNC registry came into effect, with more than half of those suggesting "big reductions." The economic impact of Canada's national DNC list on the multibillion-dollar industries that rely on telemarketing remains to be seen.

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Evolving scheduling models improve workforce management

What's the most valuable asset in your call centre? Of course, it's your front-line agents. Teleperformance reveals how its workforce management model is evolving uniquely at each of its sites in Canada and even within sites for individual clients. » BY CHRISTOPHER WATCHORN

Our workforce management team supports five different scheduling models. We started from seniority based scheduling and have evolved each model over time responding to the client needs and their customer requirements balanced with our employees' preferences.

With our team-based scheduling model, agents are scheduled to work the same days and all start within a two hour window of each other. This builds strong teams and acts as a great competitive tool internally within the site. It also means that reps will be with their supervisors and peers everyday for more than 80 per cent of each shift.

Our block-scheduling model provides full-time agents with three-hour windows within which their shifts will start. We take it one-step further by working with recruitment to communicate the block as employees join our team and then schedule the new hire training based on the block. This model has been very successful with recruitment. Employees always know their approximate work schedule (within three hours) which lets them plan their time outside the call centre.

In our performance-based scheduling model, we combine tenure and recent performance to determine rankings for shift bids. This model works well on some of our larger queues; it acts as an incentive for our newest agents to strive for excellence and once one of the new hires gets an earlier start time the challenge is on for the rest of the class to follow suit.

Our flex model rewards employees who are willing to be flexible and respond to quick (from a few hours to a couple of days) changes

in their schedule. These employees volunteer for this arrangement and must be meeting performance standards to be selected. They are paid a shift premium and are required to be flexible at least 80 per cent of the time each month. This group typically represents five to 15 per cent of the staff for any campaign and provides us with pre-arranged flexibility to respond to volume pattern changes in advance of the next schedule or whatever hurdle needs to be overcome right now.

We continue to have seniority based scheduling for a few of our smaller campaigns.

Adding further complexity to the scheduling process is working with different models for the same campaign when calls are handled at multiple sites. This isn't easy but it's the right thing to do.

In partnership with our Organizational Effectiveness team, monthly focus groups are held at each site for those employees celebrating a birthday that month. Ongoing feedback is solicited from the reps; their feedback is recorded anonymously and it forms the foundation of our scheduling evolution. We strive to build upon feedback to make our processes better to deliver on our commitment to our employees.

We have worked with our clients to ensure they deliver accurate forecasts and/or review and sign-off on all our assumptions every week. We believe that to mitigate employee impacts it's critical that each client is involved in your processes. We are a third-party call centre organization and we must continually offer our clients and their customers' high service standards. This can be planned out in advance with effective workforce management tool usage.

At Teleperformance, we use Blue Pumpkin and continually take advantage of on-site hands-on training directly from the manufacturer. With complex models and historical patterns, the traditional hand-me-down model of training for the workforce management team is not sufficient. Our new analysts joining the workforce management team begin with one campaign and as their competencies improve we cross train on all our other campaigns. This process takes upwards of six months as consistent proficiency must be demonstrated before moving on to the next campaign.

Supporting multiple models can only be successful through a maniacal focus on all facets of the overall operation. By combining strong analytics with ongoing feedback from our clients and front-line reps, our scheduling models will continue to evolve.

TIPS: Speak with your front-line reps. Are they happy with their schedules? What feedback or suggestions do they have? Look at your scheduling model. How can you make it more responsive to the changes in your call centres? And most importantly, talk to your customers. What more could you be doing? How would they change things? What are their other vendors doing? Remember it's a partnership.

Christopher Watchorn is vice-president of Business Intelligence at Teleperformance in Canada; www.teleperformance.com/canada



Making better use of automated diallers

A shift in thinking about a contact centre as more than just a cost centre is increasing the attractiveness of automated diallers. But, their use and abuse has blackened the industry's image, the technology can be complex and legislation in Canada bearing down on its use is imminent. Here's information you need to know. >> BY SUSAN MACLEAN

Given that outbound calls are the lifeblood of a number of industries – real estate, insurance, banking, travel and leisure, to name a few – do not call (DNC) list compliance is a crucial aspect of conducting business in North America. In 2006, consumers in the U.S. purchased \$900 billion worth of goods and services through telemarketers, and this number was up 50 per cent from \$600 billion in telemarketing sales in 2001, before U.S. DNC legislation was passed, according to information from Compliance Systems Corporation, based in Glen Cove, NY.

Compliance Systems markets the TeleBlock Do-Not-Call Blocking System which automatically screens and blocks outbound calls against DNC lists. If a company employee – whether an executive in a branch office, a freelancer working from home, or a salesperson in the field – tries calling an individual on one of these lists, the number will be screened against the TeleBlock database hosted by VeriSign Inc.. The call will be blocked and an intercept message will inform the caller why. TeleBlock users can also call consumers who may be on the DNC list based upon permission-based or existing business relationships.

Using both Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology and traditional phone service (wireline), TeleBlock requires no office installation, additional equipment or set-up fees. It transforms

do-not-call compliance from being a moving target – which companies have to regularly scrub, vet, and de-dupe – to a real-time, turnkey solution proven by having already processed over six billion calls, a number equal to the entire global population.

Maximizing talk time

Regina, SK-based MarkeTel Systems Ltd. also welcomes the DNC roll out “as we have had the technology to automatically scrub against national DNC since day one of inception in the USA,” says CEO Ngee Cau. “Our technology will give the telemarketers ease of mind and prevent them from paying any penalty. Our biggest differentiator is in the ‘first hello’ technology, meaning there is no pause, no delay.”

The company is just now releasing its newest predictive dialler. Called the Pursuit Advanced Telephony Server, it is described as a task-focused predictive dialler that can integrate with digital, analog or VoIP phone lines. The PBX and predictive dialler “is designed to be able to take the place of our current product, MKII, but with the ability to scale in size, capability to connect to analog, T1 and VoIP, and expandability for more functionality,” Cau says.

Intended for contact centres of all sizes, installation involves connecting Pursuit to the manager's computer via an Ethernet connec-

tion and plugging the operator stations and phone lines into the ports on the telephony card located at the back of the server. Communication between Pursuit and Prospector, its controller software, is accomplished over a TCP/IP network, giving the option of having the Pursuit dialler on-site or stored in a remote location.

Pursuit also gives the choice of having computers or just a telephone in front of operators. Using MarkeTel's patented keytone entry technology, operators can log on and off the system and enter results for each call by using the telephone keypad on their SIP phone. Caller information is displayed on the telephone's LCD, enabling operators' to see all pertinent information.

Preview and progressive

Predictive diallers are one option for automating outbound calls. Preview and progressive dialling are two alternatives.

While all of these automatically dial from a list of numbers, a predictive dialler turns all calls over to an agent when a human responds. A preview dialler first presents the agent with the information about the prospect or customer to be called and requires a response either to make the call or not to make the call. Progressive dialling is between the two as it also presents contact information to the call centre agent prior to dialling

the phone number, but that is for only a few seconds of reviewing and the agent cannot stop the dialler from automatically placing the call.

Avaya, Nortel and Telus are among the companies that have evolved their offerings to include preview and/or progressive dialling systems.

Frank Muzzi, director, Strategic Customer Relations at Telus reports that the company has modified its hosted CallCentreAnywhere platform to offer preview dialling. "It pops up information on a primary screen for more sensitive loyalty types of calls," he explains. "It helps in peaks and valleys to alleviate a repetitive types of call and to get agents to do outbound as time permits."

Predictive diallers are more efficient for large campaigns and save agents the wait for calls to go through and hanging up on busy signals and answering machines. But, they have a telltale pause after a live hello as they distinguish a short, live "hello" from an answering machine message.

Muzzi points out that companies turning up their diallers and trying to reach out to a lot more people than the company has agents to handle the calling gives the industry a bad reputation.

"The outbound industry is still not mature when you think about the management of outbound," he contends. "The technology of operational support of outbound campaigns has not caught up with inbound. It's difficult to find the skills to manage it. It's an acquired skill and it's hard to get the best practices around it."

Muzzi finds that often companies are using spreadsheets filled with assumptions of the contacts per hour and the number of people required.

Yet, "a lot of executives are wanting to move toward the profit centre model," he says. "They are desperately looking for tools to enable them to offer service to delight and show customers they care. Preview and progressive diallers help them make a better outbound call."



Coming up next issue: more from Avaya, RightNow Technologies and Talisma on reaching out to customers.



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Technical considerations for autodiallers

"Predictive diallers have many technical considerations that need to be addressed in order to get the most benefit from them," advises Colin Longman, manager - Solutions Operations at Telus. Here's his insight.

"If [the dialler is] being connected to a PBX system," Longman notes, "then the PBX system must be able to provide Call Progress Detection information to the dialler or the dialler must have additional hardware to perform this function by itself. Call Progress Detection is what allows the dialler to know that the phone is ringing, that it got a busy signal, an SIT (special information tone that indicates the call cannot be completed), etc. Typically, predictive diallers are making many thousands of calls during the day, and may be making several hundred call attempts in a short time span which can place a heavy load on the PBX and Central Office (CO). This load should be discussed with your PBX support and CO interconnect to ensure there is sufficient infrastructure to support the load the predictive dialler will be placing on the local and inter-exchange (long distance) facilities.

"Not so long ago, when you were making a call, you could pretty much guarantee that it would be carried across what we now call traditional phone systems, however, this is no longer the case. As people have moved to having cell phones or voice over IP (Internet protocol) phones, or a combination of both, calls may be going through many different phone systems and may be converted from TDM (what the traditional phone system uses) to IP several times. This will affect the ability for call progress detection to accurately detect what is happening with the call and will impact the efficiency of the predictive dialler system.

"Finally, we must recognize that given current technology, there will always be a delay between when the phone is answered and when the predictive dialler transfers that call to an available agent. A person usually just says "Hello" whereas an answering machine will have a longer message. The dialler needs this delay to detect the length of voice energy to determine if it is a person or an answering machine that has answered the call. It is possible to shorten the detection time, however, this will mean that more answering machines are transferred to agents.

"Preview and progressive dialling are, at their core, a method to allow someone to make an outbound call without having to manually dial the number. These methods of dialling do not require call progress detection information as the agent will be hearing the results of the call from the moment it is dialled. Preview and progressive dialling do not place a heavy load on PBX or CO facilities and can generally be implemented in a software-only method whereas predictive dialling typically has dedicated hardware," notes Longman.

Next generation of Internet frees mired processes

This series of articles is exploring four evolutionary shifts in contact centre technology. The first three, IP Telephony, Presence Services, and SOA (Service Oriented Architectures) were covered in previous issues. Here's the impact of Web 2.0, the fourth "shift" and its contribution to the Contact Centre 2.0 concept. **» BY BOB HUGGARD AND JOHN MUNRO**



Web 2.0 has the ability to break down technology and process barriers that exist in most if not all enterprises today. Beyond the walls of the enterprise, Web 2.0 allows customers, partners, vendors and employees to effectively share information and to interact real-time. Gartner would include four underlying technologies that enable Web 2.0. In summary:

- 1) AJAX: delivers an enhanced, more-responsive user experience within the confines of a modern browser;
- 2) Mashup: combines data from more than one source into a single integrated tool to improve existing processes;
- 3) Collective Intelligence: gathers knowledge and content from individuals working together with no centralized authority (e.g. Wikipedia); and
- 4) Social Network Analysis: analyzes and mines information and knowledge from many people and their personal networks.

Web 2.0 allows for a richer experience for customers interacting with a contact centre agent or a self-service channel. Enterprises can cost effectively leverage web service interfaces and mash-ups to create composite applications which service both call centre agents and customer self-service needs. The collective impact of these web 2.0 trends will enable the development of easy-to-use self-service capabilities, and the reuse of integration and workflow components to standardize and automate business processes.

The combination of Web 2.0 and SOA fur-

ther delivers features and capabilities both within and beyond the walls of an organization. Two key areas are addressed:

- 1) The elimination of organizational and process stovepipes: facilitates the seamless processing of customer transactions and real-time sharing of service delivery status to respond to the "caller" request at the point of interaction; and
- 2) The adoption of industry standards for data exchange and modeling (e.g. Acord, TMForum, HL7) to drive standardized industry business processes and enable close collaboration with partners and vendors.

Maybe just as intriguing is the concept of business process networks. By evolving beyond an individual enterprise structure and governance, and emphasizing online collaboration and system and business process interoperability, clusters of enterprises will be able to establish seamless, highly efficient cross-organization process networks.

Cross-organization process networks will have a dramatic impact on the contact centre business. Just as global toll free networks enabled a near-shore / off-shore arbitrage of labour performing customer service functions, the Web 2.0 technologies and the adoption of industry standards will enable an "arbitrage" of complete tasks or functions via a worldwide electronic market.

The cost of performing complete business transactions will be lowered as vertical mash-ups are created which clearly define the business process and interface points.

Outsourcers will be able to complete these transactions according to known processes without integrating or requiring access to their corporate legacy systems. This will allow outsourcers to innovate and adopt more efficient processes than current outsource agreements permit. Clients will benefit from a clearly defined SLA to monitor performance and having the flexibility to quickly move transactions to another supplier should one fail to meet the SLA. The market will be flexible, adaptive and brutally competitive.

The contact centre evolution enabled by Web 2.0, as well as three other "shifts" we have discussed – IP telephony, presence services and SOA, are driving us towards the realization of Contact Centre 2.0. Key to this evolution is service on the customer's terms, regardless of channel, language, time of day, or whether live or self-service, immediate or delayed, or any other characteristics of an interaction. Cost effectively personalizing the interaction to the needs of the "caller" and providing targeted, high value service are the cornerstones of our evolving industry. These "shifts" are beginning to impact our industry in meaningful and beneficial ways, improving how we provide service to our customers, and expanding where and how the centre will contribute to the corporation.

Bob Huggard and John Munro, consultants within the contact centre space, can be reached at bob.huggard@bermconsulting.com and john.munro@ambirsolutions.com respectively.



Show & tell

IN THE CONTACT CENTRE

The reality of video-based contact centre service isn't that far off and it provides a unique opportunity to create more effective self-service and revenue enhancing solutions. » BY JOHN JOSEPH

Remember back in kindergarten when you looked forward to "Show and Tell" on Fridays so you'd get the chance to talk to the class and show them one of your most prized possessions? Being able to "show" your cool new toy or pet dog made all the difference then, and it still does today. Unfortunately, until now, contact centres have only been able to engage in the "tell" portion of the information exchange with phones serving as the primary interface between them and their customers (though Web, email and SMS have recently been added to the mix). Now, with advances in both VoIP networks and mobile phone technologies, the opportunity exists to add "show" back into the equation. While a video-based contact centre may seem futuristic, a number of organizations are experimenting with the technology today.

Enterprises believe that video can provide the following benefits to customers and contact centre operations:

- **More effective technical and installation support:** We've all heard the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words." Providing video clips for frequently asked technical questions will decrease call time significantly. The caller can replay the video as needed to see what comes next and what if any steps they may have missed. In many cases, this could eliminate the need to escalate calls to expensive experts and reduce on-site visits.

- **Enhanced up-sell/cross-sell opportunities:** Many organizations try to use their IVR solutions to sell additional products to existing customers. However, many customers feel trapped and extremely annoyed when forced to listen to a lengthy offer before they can get the information they need. This can lead to lower response rates and a negative customer experience. A video call that dedicates a portion of the screen to offers and promotions could be more favourably perceived.
- **New branding and advertising opportunities:** Video can enable innovative solutions such as playing targeted ads to callers on hold and the use of avatars in video menus to further reinforce corporate branding.
- **Enhanced agent effectiveness for complex sales:** Video is also an effective tool that agents can use to better assist customers and speed purchasing decisions. Once the caller has explained their requirements, the agent could provide video clips for the three to four products that best suit their needs. The caller would then be able to quickly compare each product's feature set and price to quickly reach a decision. This solution is ideal for helping customers to better understand the nuances of big ticket electronics and specialized sporting equipment. It also enables financial advisors to easily demonstrate their latest investment opportunities, allows real

estate agents to push only those properties that best match a buyer's requirements and lets travel agents show hotel details to assist in the booking of reservations.

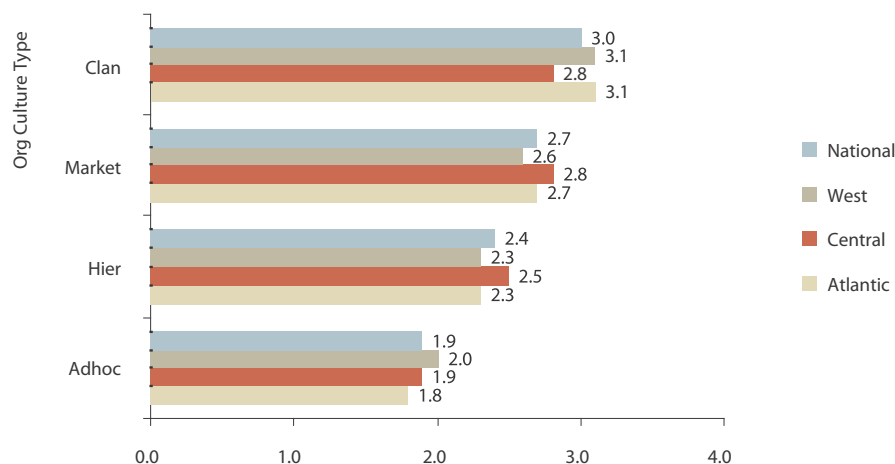
Adding video to your contact centre may not be as difficult as you think. Today's more advanced IVR platforms already offer video capabilities. VoIP ensures that applications can seamlessly handle both voice and video in the same call. For greater flexibility and development efficiencies, choose a platform with the most supported standards and multi-channel capabilities available. Also, it is important to separate user interface design from the application logic. This enables you to offer the same service across many different communication channels (standard voice call, video enhanced call, Web self-service, etc.). Taking this approach will make you more agile and able to quickly introduce new services as mobile phone enhancements are developed.

Being the first to offer a more engaging and useful customer experience will definitely pay off in future loyalty so every organization should consider where video could enhance the experience of their customers. In the not too distant future, customers may begin to think twice about organizations that can't or won't handle their video call.

John Joseph is vice president of corporate marketing at Envoy Worldwide, a voice solutions provider based in Westborough, Mass.

Figure 1: The Competing Values Framework by Cameron and Quinn (2006)



Figure 2: Organizational Culture Type (All)

Attracting and retaining employees continues to be a major preoccupation for human resource (HR) managers in many contact centre organizations in Canada. A study conducted by Workopolis in 2007 examined job satisfaction of Canadian employees and discovered that organizational culture was almost twice as important as job satisfaction for sustained employee engagement. Although the study cut across many different types of industries and occupations, it raised some interesting questions about the role of organizational culture in understanding why employees stay or go.

Over 320 managers from in-house and out-sourced contact centre work establishments participated in a 2007 survey about Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) Alignment for contact centres in Canada. SHRM examines a number of factors about the effectiveness of HR in an organizational context, including organizational culture. In fact, reviews of organizational culture's relationship to SHRM suggest that not only does organizational culture play a significant role in keeping employees, it also is important for aligning the organization towards higher levels of performance.

Understanding a firm's culture

In this study, we used the Competing Values Framework by K.S Cameron and R.E. Quinn, (*Diagnosing and changing organizational culture: based on the competing values framework*) to provide us with a deeper analysis of the organizational cultures for each of the companies participating in the survey.

This approach provided us with a picture of organizational culture which was developed from the perceptions of employees about the organization's overall cultural profile and dominant characteristic traits (see Figure 1).

This framework helps us assess organizations based on four main culture types, each with notable characteristics which distinguish one from another. In studies conducted using this organizational culture study approach it is typical that a company will have one dominant culture type and demonstrate varying degrees of each of the other types. These culture types can be briefly described as follows:

Clan: A social environment in which employees work well together in teams. Leaders focus on mentoring employees and facilitating group problem solving. High levels of employee loyalty are often found in environments with this type of dominant culture type. A strong emphasis on cooperation and openness are evident and the environment is highlighted by a concern for people and customers.

Market: A results-orientated approach with an emphasis on growing the market and customer base. Leaders are hard driving and competitive with a high demand for achievement. Emphasis is on being a market leader which is pursued through a goal-orientation.

Hierarchy: An environment with a high emphasis on rules and processes. Leaders within such environments are typically good coordinators and organizers. The focus of this dominant organizational culture type is to develop a stable environment with job se-

curity and conformity to rules by employees. Dependability and efficiency are key elements of success.

Adhocracy: An innovative, creative environment which encourage risk-taking. Leaders in this dominant organizational culture type are entrepreneurial in nature and encourage others to take risks and innovate. Being first with new ideas for services and products is important to employees who are motivated by challenges and new opportunities.

The four culture types are further defined based on six key dimensions which include the dominant characteristics of the culture, the type of organizational leadership, the approach to management of employees, the organizational glue, the strategic emphasis and criteria for success of the organization.

Canadian contact centres' cultures

The competing values framework provided us with the Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI) questionnaire, which helped to gather information about employee perceptions about an organization's overall cultural profile and dominant characteristic traits. The survey questions addressed each of the six key dimensions listed above for each of the four culture types. For each question, participants were asked to consider four statements (each of which addressed one of the four cultural types – clan, hierarchy, adhocracy and market culture) and distribute a total of ten points among the four statements.

The study findings revealed that a clan-type culture is the most dominant in contact centre work establishments (see Figure 2).

This trend was consistent throughout all comparisons nationally and regionally, as well as by contact centre type (in-house versus outsourced). The second dominant organizational culture type is market, which places an emphasis on a results orientation

centres, however (see Figures 3 and 4). The major difference can be found in the narrowing of the gap between clan and market between the two.

In the outsourced contact centres, we note that clan is still the most dominant organi-

Clan: We found that contact centres with a clan (social) type organizational culture tended to report lower levels of turnover and higher levels of employee satisfaction.

Market: Contact centres with a market (results-oriented) type organizational culture were more likely to have higher levels of turnover and lower levels of employee satisfaction. Although the main type of organizational culture in this study was clan, it was closely followed by a market orientation. It should also be noted that the gap between clan and market cultures was reduced in outsourced contact centre environments where higher levels of turnover were found. The results reveal a much higher negative correlation in outsourced environments between market culture and employee satisfaction.

Adhocracy: The results suggested that contact centres that had more adhocracy (innovation and creativity) also had lower turnover. However, while adhocracy was positively correlated to employee satisfaction in both in-house and outsourced contact centres, a much higher correlation was found in outsourced centres.

Hierarchy: Also, a higher score on the hierarchy culture (rules) was correlated with higher levels of turnover and lower levels of employee satisfaction.

Our preliminary findings suggest that employees in contact centres are more satisfied and stay longer in environments with a dominant clan (social) culture and less satisfied in environments with a higher market orientation. Moreover, employee turnover and satisfaction are impacted by the influences of organizational culture and the emphasis on HRM investment. So in short, organizational culture does seem to be associated with how long employees stay in contact centres in Canada.

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Figure 3: In-house Organizational Culture Type

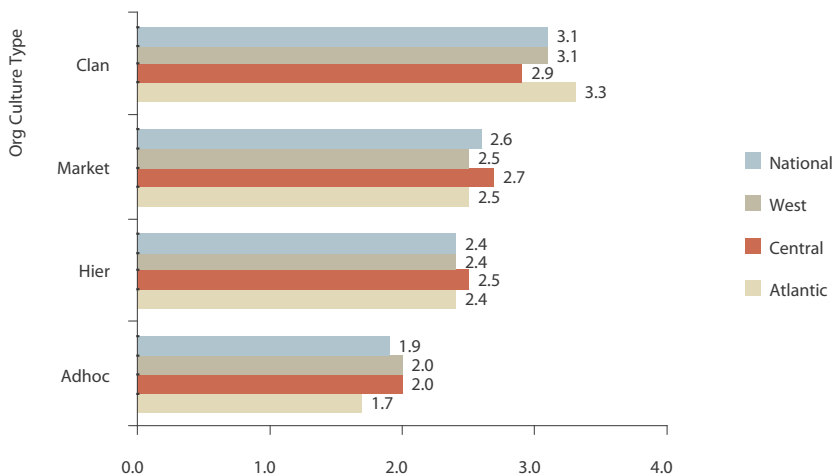
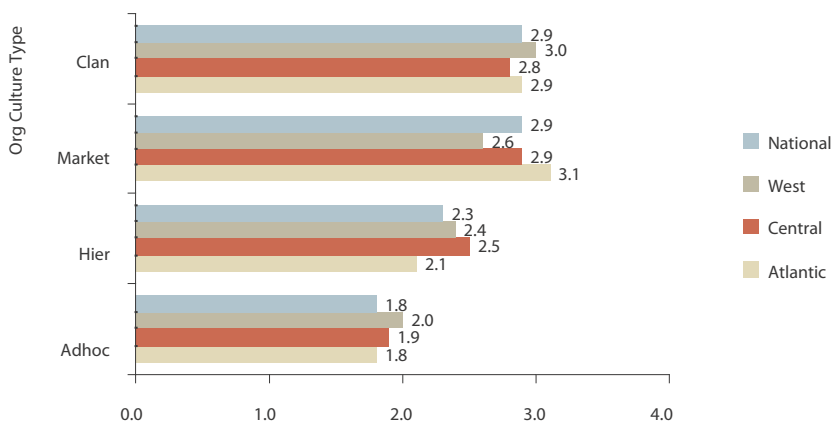


Figure 4: Outsourced Organizational Culture Type



that contact centres are so well known for in managing operations. Market is followed closely by a hierarchy culture type which also points to the rules, practices and process-based orientation of contact centres. Finally, adhocracy is rated significantly lower in each region and contact centre type.

There are some distinct differences between in-house and outsourced contact

zational type but with a lower score than the national and in-house average. Also, the market organizational culture type is higher in the outsourced contact centres.

Initial analyses from our study suggest that there are specific organizational culture types that more strongly correlate to lower or higher voluntary turnover rates and employee satisfaction.

TOP 10 TRAINING TIPS

Speaking at a contact centre conference in Orlando last month, I experienced a unique brand of customer service with the hotel staff. The agent did not have the skill or authority to respond to my request – a training issue that could have been avoided. » BY JEFF DORAN

My room overlooked the loading docks and garbage bins behind the hotel. I could live with the view, however when the delivery trucks started arriving at 4:00 in the morning, the noise was hard to take. So I spoke to a customer service agent, explained my problem and requested a new room. The person was very polite but indicated they were fully booked and did not have another room available. I continued to describe my dilemma and again, the agent indicated they had no more rooms available but this time offered me a couple of solutions. She suggested I wear ear plugs at night. I told her I didn't have any ear plugs and I didn't think I could sleep with them in my ears anyway. She then suggested I try cotton. "It's softer and might be more comfortable". I let her know I wasn't interested in the cotton idea either. She apologized again and said that there really wasn't much she could do. I thanked her for her time and asked if she would be able to offer me a discount on the room for the inconvenience. She had to check with her supervisor. A minute later, she came back and said that they did not want a dissatisfied customer and immediately assigned me a new room.

Now, am I to assume that a room magically became available between the time she left to talk to her supervisor and the time she returned? It's possible, but highly unlikely. Why wasn't a new room offered in the first place? I find it interesting that I was offered a new room only after money entered the equation. In the end, I got what I wanted and the agent satisfied another customer – sort of.

I would like to think that this is not a policy issue but a training issue. If that's the case, then a number of things need to be incorporated into the training process to ensure this doesn't happen again. Here is my Top Ten suggestion list.

1. Develop a quality call document.

Define a quality call and make sure everyone is familiar with its components. This is not a script, but a guideline to help create consistency in the

way customers are serviced.

2. Anticipate customer concerns and practice responses to those concerns. Again, this must be consistent from agent to agent to make sure that all customers are treated equally.

3. Give sufficient authority to the front line. Allow the agent to make more meaningful decisions on behalf of the organization. This will drive up your first call resolution stats and make the agents feel much more in control.

4. Practice in a safe environment. Make sure agents are comfortable with all different situations. If they have the tools/skills to properly manage the call they will feel much more confident and provide better customer service.

5. Listen to recorded calls. If you can have your agents listen to their own calls, nine times out of 10, they will tell you what they did wrong and correct it themselves.

6. Develop a rigorous quality monitoring regimen. Measure a consistent number of calls per agent each month and feed that information back to the agent for remedial or up-skill training. Reviews should be done during weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly review sessions.

7. Provide regular coaching. Supervisors or quality coaches need to administer a variety of coaching techniques to satisfy the demands of the business and agent learning styles. This could include side-by-side, one-on-one, remote, peer-to-peer and group sessions.

8. Build training and development into employee performance evaluations. This helps motivate agents to seek out training on their own and proactively ask for assistance.

9. Tie training and development to a career path model. If you don't have a career path model, it's a good idea to establish one. Employees need a vision of where they are going in the company and they need to know

the skills, competencies, knowledge and experience needed to get there.

10. Discuss career path and development opportunities quarterly. Annual performance evaluations and career path discussions are not sufficient in today's tight labour market. This is an important component of your retention strategy.

Enlightened contact centres are aware of the effect that targeted training and development has on customer satisfaction. They also know the effect it has on employee morale and retention. In fact, from our Best Practices Report, Training and Development scores as one of the highest employee satisfaction categories for Contact Centre Employer of Choice certified contact centres.

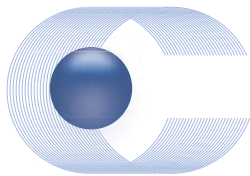
It's important to understand that training and development programs are becoming more than just product knowledge and skills improvement sessions. They are becoming an integral component of the overall strategy of the contact centre and organization.

From orientation through to succession planning, make sure you are training and developing your employees to be successful in their careers. You don't want to be the one looking out your window at the garbage bins and loading docks wondering if your agents are providing outstanding customer service, or worse, if they're thinking of leaving the company.

At a glance

After working recently with an Egyptian outsourcer in Cairo and talking with management and staff, I've come to the conclusion that wherever your contact centre is located, employees want the same things: opportunities to learn, grow and be part of a successful organization. Make sure your training and development program reflects this.

Jeff Doran is president of CCEOC Inc; 416-886-7007; jdoran@ccemployerofchoice.com



contact centre nova scotia

The year ended for this new association with a wine and cheese networking event at the Sydney Marine Terminal in Cape Breton on Dec. 5.

At press time, members were being notified of a symposium with Xerox in Dartmouth, NS, on Jan. 15, 2008. The morning session at the Ramada Renaissance would begin with breakfast and deal with recruiting in the shrinking labour market. A Recognition and Team Building event is in the works for March 2008.

The Annual General Meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 15, 2008. As part of the AGM, the CCNS Association will facilitate an afternoon of discussions and presentations focused on "Positioning Yourself as an Employer of Choice". Details will be posted at www.contactcentrenovascotia.com.



Ottawa Regional Call Centre Association

Intergenerational challenges in the workplace, legal issues when terminating employment and getting organized to the Max (Ann Max, that is) – these were the topics of this past fall's monthly networking sessions enjoyed by ORCCA members and visitors.

On Sept. 18, members learned from organizational psychology consultant Mathieu Beaudoin just what makes our X and Y colleagues tick. Incidentally, these colleagues span ages 15 to 41 years old, said Beaudoin. He told attendees that surveys reveal that different generations have divergent expectations with respect to: how to do their work; their relationship with hierarchy; and how they express work dissatisfaction. Beaudoin also described the top six critical leadership behaviours to manage "the workforce of tomorrow." These are detailed in the archived presentation at ORCCA's website,

www.callcentres.org.

On Oct 18, 2007, Russell Zinn, senior partner, Ogilvy Renault LLP, spoke about "the back-end of the employment relationship" and listed the following 10 problem employee types:

- the moaner – making numerous complaints of a trivial nature;
- the liar – being dishonest, can range from reasons for lateness to theft;
- the worrier – complaining of being too stressed;
- the bully – threatening behaviour, harassment or discrimination;
- the fashion victim – breaking dress and appearance rules;
- the personal hygiene sufferer – body odour or other personal issues;
- the addict – alcohol and drug problems in the workplace;
- the sex-site surfer – viewing porn on the internet;
- the sex pest – office relationships and sexual harassment;
- the thief – stealing from the company or committing fraud.

Given that termination may eventually seem the best recourse, Zinn recommended five actions, beginning when hiring, that will help reduce termination claims down the road. They are:

- correctly define and describe the job;
- do employee background checks;
- deal with employee problems;
- use employment contracts or hiring letters that include termination provisions; and
- create a workplace environment that respects human right.

These are also detailed in the archived presentation at the association's website.

November's meeting offered attendees tips to gain "more space, more time, more life!" Speaker Ann Max, president of Ottawa-based Organized to the Max, offered suggestions on controlling one's time and environment to reduce the stresses of everyday life.

In December, at press time, a contact centre site tour was the scheduled monthly activity.

ORCCA members and guests can look forward to another year of regular networking and professional development meetings in 2008. As in the past, these sessions will bring together professionals from this region's contact centre industry, to network and

learn from the latest developments in the marketplace.

Upcoming topics and events include: at home agents, Delivering Excellent Service: Envisioning a Culture for Quality by Larry White of Second Nature Learning Services Inc., scheduling and forecasting, an introduction to Contact Centre Canada's current projects; and, on June 4, the annual ORCCA Career Excellence Awards Gala.

Details at www.callcentres.org or call chair Sandy Freeman, Freeman International, (613) 723-2870.



Some of the coveted hardware at the tenth annual MECCA event in Winnipeg.

The tenth annual Manitoba Excellence in Contact Centre Achievement Awards (MECCA) event was held in Winnipeg on Nov. 15, 2007.

"Over 300 guests recognized some of the best and brightest in our industry," notes Cheryl Barsalou, MCCA CEO. "We recognized 28 managers and representatives with awards, awarded 10 organization trophies, three volunteer awards and appreciated the contribution of industry members and participants. Feedback heard was 'the best event yet!'"

MCCA reports that Lilly Kaminski, MCCA

chair, opened the evening along with guest Donna Miller from Contact Centre Canada. Arvel Gray was the Master of Ceremonies for the evening. Chris Stobbe entertained guests and set the mood with his saxophone as people entered the registration area. Bolero Dance Theatre, a Cuban Dance troupe, performed a series of Latin dances.

The MCCA appreciates the generosity of the following sponsors of the evening: Diamond - Office Team, Winnipeg Free Press; Emerald - Manitoba Public Insurance; Ruby - CAA Manitoba, Canad-Inns Polo Park, Canada Post Winnipeg Customer Contact Centre, CUETS Financial Ltd., MTS Allstream, RBC - Royal Bank Customer Contact Centre; Sapphire - Great West Life GCCS, Manitoba Hydro, Rogers Business Solutions.

The Community and Environment Awards went to both CUETS Financial Ltd. and MTS Allstream. CUETS Financial Ltd. also scooped up the Technology and the Employee Satisfaction Awards, along with the RBC Royal Bank Customer Contact Centre. RBC won the Training & Performance Management Award along with CAA Manitoba.

Volunteer Appreciation Awards were issued to Sheldon Stoller and Lynda Skoda, each named distinguished volunteer for the 10 years of service. Tammy Boyko, Scott Donald and Lesley Stadnyk received recognition for their five years of volunteering.

Congratulations to the many 2007 MECCA Awards winners. For more award details, go to <http://www.mcca.mb.ca/event-2007mecca.htm>.

Earlier, MCCA recognized November 2007 as Contact Centre Industry month by coordinating tours of contact centres in Manitoba. More than 130 industry professionals, recruitment and job placement agency representatives, government officials and curious employee candidates attended tours of seven MCCA member centres over a three day period.

MCCA thanks Archway Marketing Services, CAA Manitoba, Canada Post, Great West Life, MTS Allstream, RBC Royal Bank and TWCC (Tribal Wi-Chi-Way-Win Capital Corporation) for hosting one or more tours of their centres and providing a valuable experience for many of the participants who had never seen the inside of a contact centre.

"These tours really do help to promote and build the positive image of the industry, and we

have received extremely encouraging feedback from this year's tour participants. Mark your calendars and plan to host a tour next year," notes MCCA's excellent newsletter.

Also in November, MCCA kicked off Canada Career Week by participating in the first Annual Parents' Forum at Tec Voc High School. MCCA was there representing the contact centre industry and the association's members! A collaborative endeavor of Manitoba Industry Groups, the event was the first of its kind in the province. It gave parents and caregivers the tools they needed to assist their youth in making informed Manitoba career choices. Over 150 interested parents received information on job opportunities in the contact centre industry.

Coming up May 14 & 15 is MCCA's AGM, conference and trade show. More details next issue.



BC CCA

More than 200 contact centre professionals celebrated the best of the best at the 2007 BC CCA Awards of Excellence

on Dec. 4, 2007. The evening at the River Rock Casino in Richmond, BC, was hosted by Chris Johnson, aka Dr. Laugh. Dinner was followed by entertainment provided by Tracey Bell,

show visiting vendor booths and attending educational breakout sessions.

Chair Ilona Rule reports the 2007 winners are as follows:

Vendor of the Year - BCIT Call Centre of Excellence;

Community Spirit Award - JP Morgan Chase;

Contact Centre Employee of the Year - both Chelsea MacLean, Accenture Business Services for BC, and Kevin Quan, Telus;

Contact Centre of the Year - Accenture Business Services for BC.

BC CCA acknowledges the generous support of sponsors: Telus, Bell, Rogers, HSBC Bank Canada, Cisco, Aspect, Canadian Communication Products Inc. (CCP), The Vancouver Sun / The Province, Rocky Mountaineer Vacations, impark and LinxBC.

The association's president Jean Mitchell has announced on the website (www.bccallcentre.com) that "a new vision and direction we will be embarking on as your association over the next five years." She reports that the BC CCA will encourage more individual members as well as maintain a strong base of corporate members. On the advice of a new BC CCA Strategic Planning Committee created last year, members at a special general meeting in September ratified a new Constitution and By-Laws as well as renewed the membership focus. "Now we're



The contact centre team at Accenture Business Services for BC was declared by the BC CCA as Contact Centre of the Year.

(eight divas in 44 minutes) and then the glamour and recognition of the award program. The following morning, over 175 attendees joined the conference and trade

in a position to move ahead to expand the Association and provide value to programs and to corporate sponsorship," she reports.



» BY GAIL MERCER-MACKAY

I was attending a networking luncheon recently. Our table of women professionals each had five minutes to introduce ourselves to our colleagues and describe what we do. When I explained that I work in the call centre industry I (predictably) saw a few women cringe.

"Do you work for one of those companies who call me at dinnertime?"

I laughed and said that no, while it is my customers who actually make the phone calls, they are often using technology that I have sold them. I went on to explain that the industry as a whole is sensitive to finding ways of making better calls at better times. That this is typically done through a combination of improved technology and good training which means a better experience for customers.

There were a few eye-rolls and it got me wondering why exactly does outbound selling have such a bad rap? Oh, I know we've all had frustrating experiences receiving phone calls from annoying sales people at inopportune times; but, I've also had bad experiences with annoying sales people at a car dealership or even when trying to shop for clothing or a pair of shoes. Bad sales experiences are not limited to the telephone.

Many of us can point out a new roof, windows, soffits or an up-graded air conditioner or furnace that are the direct result of telemarketing. My insurance company carved a nice chunk of change off my auto insurance by helping me combine policies, and my telephone provider has been pro-active in offering me new programs that suit my life-

Humour on the Line

style and my budget. All of these transactions were initiated by outbound auto-diallers and well-informed telesales people who were professional and courteous.

Of course, none of the telesales people tried to date me. And while the following experience with auto-dialling can't be a major contributor to telesales getting such negative publicity, I do think it may be more common than one might expect.

A friend who I'll call Mary had just graduated from college and was looking for work. She hadn't planned on a career in a call centre but the ad promised great wages plus bonus, so she applied. The interview process was short. She qualified with her distinctive voice (the recruiter was complimentary though some think she sounds like Minnie Mouse on speed) and the fact that she had a pulse. Mary was so thrilled to get the job that she didn't even ask what kind of calls she would be taking.

The job turned out to be selling magazine subscriptions.

At the time, calling strangers and asking them to buy something filled Mary with fear. Her supervisor convinced her that she would not be selling, but would be offering a service and it was up to the customer if they wanted to take advantage of it. That line of thinking kind of appealed to her so she jumped full speed into the training. She followed her script, learned how to handle objections and, by the end of the week, was feeling confident. Pumped, she went on a first date that Saturday night with a guy she had secretly admired for months. Let's call him 'Fabio'.

Mary and Fabio went for dinner and had the wonderful kind of first date you only get once or twice in a lifetime. Mary wanted to impress him so she wasn't quite honest about her job. She said she managed a customer care department. It was a stretch but how would he ever find out? They made a date for the following week.

Monday rolled around and Mary very nervously took her place at her station and positioned her head set. The autodialler went to work.

The first call was to a lady who did not

speak English. She yelled at Mary in Chinese before she hung up. The next call was to a woman who sounded exhausted. A baby screamed in the background. "What?" she snapped. "You're calling me about a magazine subscription? I've spent all night trying to get my baby to sleep." She slammed the phone down.

Tears welled up in Mary's eyes. She put her phone on 'off-hook' and laid her head down on her desk. Her supervisor came over.

"Mary, is there a problem?"

"I don't think I'm cut out for this."

"Nonsense, you aced the training. It's like riding a horse ... you get kicked off, the best thing to do is jump back on. Go for it."

She reached over and put Mary's phone back on. Mary took a deep breath. Her supervisor was right. She was no quitter. She could do this.

Within seconds she was on with another call and began her pitch.

"Good morning. I'm calling you today to tell you that you have been selected to receive up to five free magazines. Tell me, of the following ten magazines, which magazines have you read or are likely to read." Mary listed them off and waited for a response.

A moment of silence, and then her caller spoke.

"Mary? Is that you?"

It was Fabio. Busted.

Mary cut the call, ripped off her headset, got up and walked out of the centre. She didn't stop to quit, didn't stop to collect her paycheque, didn't even remember to take her coat.

Well, it's a few years later and Mary's a few years wiser .. and successful in this industry. She learned that in life and at work, honesty is always the best policy. Like me, Mary's learned to love call centres, outbound and inbound. We love the good changes in the industry and that for the companies who get it right, the focus is always about helping the customer.

Oh, and Fabio? Mary never heard from him again.

Gail Mercer-Mackay has more than 20 years' experience in the industry and has almost never dated by autodialler.

BC QUALITY OF LIFE ATTRACTS SKILLED MULTILINGUAL LABOUR FORCE

With *The best place on earth* as its slogan, British Columbia ranks second only to Ontario as Canada's province with the greatest number of contact centre employees, according to the Contact Centre Industry report by Danielle van Jaarsveld, Ann C. Frost and David Walker.

This hub of contact centre activity is supported by the BC Contact Centre Association (BC CCA), the active provincial association. Association president Jean Mitchell cites multilingual and highly skilled labour as among the province's attractions for contact centres locating here.

"Every language is spoken here, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish and German," she reports. She says that large U.S. outsourcing centres with proximity to the U.S. market have no trouble filling the requirement for Spanish as a second language.

Secondary school students in British Columbia achieve some of the highest scores in international tests of core skills. In the index of average scores rating the performance of international youth in math, science, reading and problem solving, BC ranks at the top, beating out Japan, the rest of Canada and the United States. Recent statistics cite 65 per cent of BC employees as having post-secondary education and more than 22 per cent hold a university degree.

That noted, with an unemployment rate slightly below the national average, labour availability in the larger centres is an issue. But, smaller communities in rural regions are said to still offer resources, especially for specialty contact centres.

Global magnet

Still, the province's expanding economy and outstanding quality of life make it a global magnet for mobile talent so international immigration is a key source of new skills. The Mercer Group's 2007 Quality of Living Survey ranks Vancouver third out of 215 cities worldwide and first in North America.

In addition to quality of life, BC also boasts less regulatory overhead and a lower tax burden than some other provinces. Its west coast location provides competitive access to key U.S. and offshore markets.

Almost 40,000 skilled workers immigrated to BC between 2001 and 2005. A fast-track immigration process expedites recruitment of highly skilled foreign workers, and a provincial program introduced in 2005 accelerates the entry of skilled immigrants into their fields of

expertise.

The BC Ministry of Finance in its "Budget and Fiscal Plan — 2007/08 to 2009/10" projects an average annual employment growth rate of two per cent, with the goods producing sector growing at a significantly higher rate (3.2 per cent) than the service producing sector (1.7 per cent). The industrial growth

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Innovative Contact Centre Solutions

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drives the demand for occupations and accordingly, jobs concentrated in the primary and manufacturing and construction sectors are at the fore, such as the trades, transport and equipment operators, processors and manufacturers.

While all regions of the province are projected to experience increases in employment over the next five years, the three regions of Vancouver are anticipated to grow considerably more slowly than the province as a whole. The north and northwest regions are expected to grow by more than three per cent per year, fuelled by mega projects in the utilities, other transportation (including pipelines), water transportation (including port

developments) and mining. But with those jobs come spouses, providing a potentially untapped source of labour for contact centre operations, perhaps particularly for those with a distributed workforce.

Older average worker

Labour force and participation rate projects indicate several currently occurring and forthcoming trends. "First, British Columbia's labour force is projected to continue to experience healthy growth in absolute terms while second, it continues to evolve towards that of an older average worker," reports Sarah Harrower in BC Stats, the publication of Service BC, Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services.

"Recent changes to mandatory retirement

laws, pension access rules that allow for continued work attachment, and the adoption of more flexible work arrangements reflect changing attitudes towards older workers," she continues. "Further, recent increases in the labour force participation rate of older workers may suggest changing attitudes among workers towards retirement, increasing the potential to retain workers from what will continue to be a key demographic group for B.C."

BC CCA can be reached at 604-682-0296; www.bccallcentre.com. Invest British Columbia, a partnership of provincial, federal and local economic development organizations working together to expand business investment in the province is at www.investbc.com; 604-775-2202.

coming events 2008

February 5

Greater Toronto Area Contact Centres (GTACC) meeting features panel of experienced industry leaders; 8:00-10:00am; 250 Yonge St., 35th Floor, Ontario Collaboration Centre. www.gtacc.ca or Sangeeta Bhatnagar at 416-564-0399

February 13-15

ICMI Call Center Demo & Conference, Miami, FL, www.callcenterdemo.com

February 25-27

4th Executive Customer Feedback Summit, Las Vegas, NV, www.iqpc.com

March 9-12

HDI 2008 Annual Conference & Expo, Dallas, TX, www.thinkhdi.com

March 9-12

ACE 2008 – The Aspect Customer Experience, Atlanta, GA, www.aspect.com

March 12

Call centre tours; BC Contact Centre Association; 604 682 0296; www.bccontactcentre.com

March 17-20

VoiceCon Orlando 2008, Orlando, FL, www.voicecon.com

March 26

2nd Annual Customer Issue & Complaint Management Conference, Metropolitan Hotel, Toronto, ICSA; 905-477-5544; www.icsa.on.ca

March 26-28

Society of Workforce Planning Professionals (SWPP) Annual Conference, Nashville, TN, www.swpp.org

May 8-9

Annual ICSA-TC Conference; watch for details; www.icsa.on.ca

May 12-14

10th Annual Conference and Tradeshow, Alberta Call Centre Association; Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton; 1-877-843-4532; www.abccallcentre.com

May 14-15

Manitoba Customer Contact Association AGM, Trade Show and Conference, Canada Inns Polo Park, Winnipeg, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm; www.mcca.mb.ca; 204-975-6464

May 15

Tentative date for Contact Centre Nova Scotia AGM; www.contactcentrenovascotia.com; 902-406-7777

June 3

"Tough Talks" roundtable for managers and team leaders presented by Canadian Marketing Association's Contact Centre Council; Toronto area; watch for details; www.thecma.org

June 4

Annual ORCCA Awards Gala, Ottawa Regional Call Centre Association, www.callcentres.org; 613-723-2870

June 19

Annual ICSA-TC Wine & Cheese; watch for details; www.icsa.on.ca

September 30-October 3

CAM-X 44th Annual Convention & Trade Show; Deerhurst, ON; 905-309-0224; www.camx.ca



Need advice? Ask Affy!

Q Dear Affy. Our company has aggressive plans for growth and in the next six months, we have to hire about 250 agents. Our executive wants to know how we will make them really good agents, really fast. Do you have any insight how we can implement this well? -- Ravi M.

A Ravi, poor en masse hiring choices and adding many weak agents into your call centre operation typically leads to long-term problems with customer experience, lower agent and manager morale, and increased attrition of both. Here are some best practices to develop skilled agents quickly.

Recruiting:

- There is often anxiety to "get the numbers". Instead, be ruthless to filter out the worst and hire the best using rigorous agent profile and screening tools.
- Hire more than you actually need to manage induction training attrition. Because recruiting is never foolproof, be rigorous about using the induction process to weed out poor candidates early. Ops, recruiting and training should all be in sync about the criteria.
- It's important for coaches to mentor trainees to help them reduce the stress of information overload. A face-to-face or evening phone call helps reduce attrition of good candidates.

Training and coaching:

- First train for frequent call types and customer experience and then train products, process, systems after agents have become proficient on the first set of calls.
- Emphasize practice over knowledge – more than half the time should be spent actually using the skills needed. Trainees are drowning in too much information.
- Hone in on the knowledge/skill gaps for each new graduate and have an individualized plan to close those gaps quickly. Don't assume they can do the job straight out of training. They need frequent testing via remote CQA and side by side with their leader, ongoing and immediate coaching from well-trained team leaders.

Measurement:

- Create performance measures that are specific to a new hire and their expected learning curve. Ramp them up to full performance but let them be successful at each stage. Focus on the customer experience. Stay away from AHT in the beginning so they do it well before you ask them to do it well AND fast.
- Ensure that Ops, Training, and Academy Bay agree on the standards for when agents are considered proficient enough to speak to a customer. Do not let agents who have not yet passed out of the "Do No Harm" stage practice on unsuspecting customers.

These are a few of the best practices that should help you build a well-oiled proficiency machine. Good luck, Ravi!

Afshan Bye, a partner at SwitchGear Consulting, has 20 years' experience in this industry. Please send your Ask Affy question to susan@contactmanagement.ca. We'll run the Q&A anonymously in the next issue.

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