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Jan / Feb 2007

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BC quality of life attracts skilled, multilingual labour



Meeting customers' expectations

The start of another year just seems to lend itself to taking stock and attempting to look through a bigger picture. Where are we and what's in store for 2007?

Here's what Witness Systems' principal global market consultant Oscar Alban recently noted in his blog at www.improveeverything.com. "The biggest disconnect that exists in enterprises today is between the contact centre and marketing department. Many marketing dollars are spent trying to learn what customers think and feel. To gain this insight, marketing organizations spend a significant amount of money on focus groups, where they elicit the voice of the customer. Ironically, contact centres are involved with a continuous and very large focus group every day. One key element of workforce optimization is the realization that an opportunity to capture the true voice of the customer exists within every contact centre ... and it's essentially free. Contact centre management, reach out to marketing. Marketing, recognize the strategic asset that the contact centre actually is. In so doing, the enterprise scores."

Gary Barnett, CTO and exec VP at Aspect Technical Services and Research Development writes: "I believe that in 2007 company executives will increase their focus on the contact centre as a source of revenue generation, and place more emphasis on the contact centre as the predominant way to retain customers."

In order to achieve these objectives, he thinks contact centres will focus on the following trends, some of which have been gaining momentum for a few years but can now incorporate "new technologies that will accelerate acceptance." Firstly, he cites a unified approach such as that of VoIP adopters who are migrating to VoIP "to take a more complete view of their customers and focus on customer experiences from the consistency and ease of use perspective." Another trend is performance management and "the ability for managers and executives to access information in different ways, and to use that data more efficiently to determine where their companies really stand with customers and to more effectively reach both service and financial targets." A third trend is "retaining agents by improving work environments by focusing on technology such as workforce management or quality management solutions." And lastly, self service. "We will see the continued adoption of speech as companies look at incorporating more speech into self service; and, a closer tie between the web and contact centre self service so that customers can start with self service on the web and end up in the contact centre."

It still all boils down to meeting customers' expectations, doesn't it? This issue features technology, tips and techniques for companies like yours as you try to meet those expectations and even stay one step ahead. We wish you success in 2007 and hope you'll find us good company on the ride!

Susan Maclean
Editor



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next issue...

MARCH/APRIL – Developing global partnerships, international site selection strategy, the how and why of mystery calling, regional profile on Quebec.

MAY/JUNE – Protecting against identity theft, how to find and evaluate an outsource option, inbound software showcase, regional profile on Alberta.

..TECH ROADMAP SEEKS YOUR OPINION...

What is the agent of the future going to look like? Will she/he be working from home with a headset? Will it be a multi-lingual avatar on a website? What will be the impact on human resources management?

Contact Centre Canada will be looking for information and your opinions as part of an upcoming study on key emerging technologies, expected workforce skill gaps and priority industry issues. It's all part of Technology Roadmap, a new project Contact Centre Canada has launched in partnership with Industry Canada. Technology Roadmap will look at the

five-year trend in technology evolution to ensure that the Canadian workforce skill sets are in place to meet changes. John Gelder has been named project manager and preliminary data gathering has begun. An advisory committee is being struck and the consulting firm AtFocus has been enlisted to help assemble the information collected.

Initial activities include vendor market/analysis reports on IP contact centres, meetings with key industry vendors and contact centre executive to review stages of technology uptake of small versus large

centres and inhouse versus outsourcers, for example.

At press time, a day-long workshop called "The Contact Centre of The Future" was set for Feb. 23 at the University of Ottawa's Executive MBA Centre. It was expected to be attended by many industry participants to generate some insight on this topic.

Contact Centre Canada would appreciate your opinion and asks that you watch for a web link to use for that purpose at www.contactcentrecanada.ca. **cm**

...CITY OF CALGARY 3-1-1 PROGRAM RECEIVES HONOUR...

The City of Calgary's 3-1-1 program is a 2006 Award of Excellence recipient of the Canadian Information Productivity Awards (CIPA), the premier information technology and innovation awards program in Canada.

Calgary launched Canada's first 3-1-1 municipal call centre service on May 18, 2005. 3-1-1 connects citizens 24/7/365 days a year with non-emergency city services through an Operations Centre that handles service requests on hundreds of municipal matters from intake through to resolution.

The City of Calgary's 3-1-1 program is the municipality's long-term customer service strategy to improve and standardize how the corporation responds to more than one million citizen inquiries and requests received annually. Calgary's 3-1-1 program uses Customer Service Request (CSR) software to co-ordinate and electronically assign work orders to field staff throughout the city. The approach eliminates the need for decentralized call centres across the organization.

With 3-1-1, citizens can call one number 24/7 to report a pothole to be fixed, request a building inspection, report a missed garbage pick-up or request hundreds of other services. The citizen automatically receives a tracking, or SR (Service Request) number, which guarantees the completion of the request. This guarantee ensures that the work order was logged, sent to the right place, and acted upon within a set time frame. For Calgarians, 3-1-1 provides a service guarantee that is easily followed-up on later, no matter

who the citizen talks to subsequently in the operations centre.

3-1-1 CSR data can provide city officials with details on everything from speed of service to identifying areas of need. Monthly data is collected by the 3-1-1 measurements team and city business units. Regular reports go to senior management and elected officials. Reports reveal statistics and trends including service-request volumes and types, on-time performance indicators, call volumes to the 3-1-1 Operations Centre and how well the city is meeting service-delivery agreements in various operations.

An annual telephone survey conducted for the city by HarGroup Research of more than 800 Calgarians using the 3-1-1 telephone service showed that 86 per cent were moderately to completely satisfied. The percentage of customers who recalled being transferred three or more times dropped to 11.5 per cent in 2006 from 25 per cent in 2005. First-call resolution of calls in 2006 was 80 per cent.

3-1-1 received a CIPA silver award in the customer care, not for profit category, at the 2006 annual awards ceremony in Toronto on Nov. 1.

"To be recognized by CIPA for our work in establishing Canada's first 3-1-1 operations centre is an honour," said Terry Pearce, manager of the City of Calgary's 3-1-1 Operations Centre. "It is rewarding to have our efforts to improve citizen response through innovative technology acknowledged on a national scale." **cm**

...ONTARIO GOVERNMENT ATTRACTS 1,000 SGS JOBS TO WINDSOR...

A new technical support centre in Windsor expected to create 1,000 high value jobs in this community has been announced by Ontario's Economic Development and Trade Minister Sandra Pupatello.

Sutherland Global Services (SGS) will provide advanced technical support for personal computer users. The new Windsor operation will phase in hiring and training for technical support agents in diagnostics and troubleshooting. SGS was to begin with 75 agents and add another 500 agents in March 2007. One thousand full-time positions will be filled by March 2008.

"This investment is a real boost to this city's economy and a vote of confidence in its highly educated workforce," Pupatello announced. "These are the kinds of investments that help put Windsor and the rest of Ontario on the radar screen to attract other businesses. We're grateful to Sutherland Global Services for choosing Ontario. We know it's because of the quality of Windsor's workforce, and the competitive advantage Ontario offers through lower corporate tax rates, health care and telecommunications costs."

Windsor is the third SGS operation in Ontario. The company operates two technical support centres in Sault Ste. Marie employing 1,300 people. SGS's COO Ashok Jain cited the abundant skilled labour, the continued support of the Government of Ontario and the spirit of partnership demonstrated by the City of Windsor in its recent choice of location. **cm**

...CCEOC CERTIFIES CRAWFORD ADJUSTERS - GRAND AND TOY...

The Contact Center Employer of Choice (CCEOC) Institute in December certified two more Canadian contact centres – Crawford Adjusters Canada's CLAIMS-ALERT contact centre and Grand & Toy contact centre operation.

Crawford Adjusters Canada's CLAIMS-ALERT contact centre in Kitchener, ON, achieved the gold level CCEOC designation on its first assessment. About 60 call centre, support and administration representatives handle well over 250,000 calls per year. Channels of communication

include: phone, web, chat, email and fax. Typical calls include: claims intake, claims-related questions, ethics and compliance inquiries, healthcare claims, emergency dispatch, surveys, class action administration, reservations and technical support

The company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Atlanta, GA-based Crawford & Company, the largest independent provider of claims management solutions to insurance companies, and self-insured entities.

Crawford Adjusters Canada decided to pursue the CCEOC designation to help en-

hance public perception, develop exceptional work environments, attract, retain and engage high performing, culturally aligned employees and have positive impact on employee/customer satisfaction. The assessment looked at three groups: call centre, telephone adjusters and support. The designation applies only to the call centre group.

"Crawford's CLAIMSALERT team is a young, energetic and dedicated group of employees," notes Jeff Doran, CCEOC Institute president. "High scores in the areas of employee/management relations, environment and facilities and customer satisfaction helped push them over the top."

Dave Nice, director, CLAIMSALERT noted: "We're very proud to have achieved Gold on the first assessment. As a company, we're going through tremendous growth and we feel it's very important to recognize the valuable contributions our employees make every day. This award tells us we're doing a lot of things right. It also tells us where we need to focus and improve."

The Grand & Toy contact centre operation achieved the first level CCEOC designation for 2006 at all three sites – Toronto, Ottawa and Edmonton. About 120 total customer services representatives handle more than a million contacts per year. Channels of communication include phone, web, chat, email and fax. Types of calls received are orders, order inquiries, product/price/account/invoice enquiries, order corrections and rush deliveries, as well as web, technical and consultative inquiries.

"Paul Gyarmati, Grand & Toy's national manager, contact centres, adds: "The result of the CCEOC assessment tells us that we are on the right track and heading in the right direction. I'm very proud of our employees and the progress we've made."

Founded in 1882, Grand & Toy offers more than 6,500 products through seven commercial distribution centres, an Internet ordering system and 50 conveniently located retail stores. The company employs 2,200 across Canada and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Office Max.

The CCEOC certification award is an industry standard for recognizing and branding people-centric contact centres. www.ccemployerofchoice.com **cm**

...GLOBAL FORUM FINALIZES PACKED AGENDA...

ICT Communications reports that the program for the world's first contact centre forum to unite contact centre decision makers across the global industry includes regional reviews that forecast the future of the industry in the world's major geographies—EMEA, Asia Pacific and the Americas—plus a series of interactive panel discussions addressing controversial industry issues. The Contact Centre Global Forum will be held for the first time in Cannes, France, from April 25 – 27, 2007 and annually thereafter.

Forum director Christina Wood notes: "The Contact Centre Global Forum won't shy away from the difficult issues our industry faces – from globalisation to employment; from customer disaffection to the industry's own shortcomings that contribute to it. By airing these subjects openly, and by encouraging action-based debate, we'll help industry leaders identify ways to transform the present and direct the future in ways that benefit contact centres, the organisations they represent and the customers they serve."

The first panel discussion is 'Why Customers Hate Us – And What We Can Do About It. The second, 'The Future For Agents – Who We Will Recruit and How,' considers how increased self-service will affect agent roles, job numbers and employer recruitment strategies as automation overtakes straightforward contact centre processes. A third, 'Global Standards – Do We Need Them and What are They For?' questions whether quality standards add value and whether a single global standard is desirable or achievable.

The future of the industry on the world's key continents will be addressed by a panel of leading analysts. Mary Wardley, vice-president of Research for global intelligence firm IDC, will consider the changing relationship between contact centres and the organisations they serve within North and South American markets. Dr Catriona Wallace, director of Call Centres.net, will examine dynamic tensions between profitability, cost and human resources demands within Asia Pacific. Finally, Evan Kirchheimer, Datamonitor research and analysis director, will examine divergences across mature and nascent markets in EMEA and assess their implications for contact centre operators, outsourcers and their clients.

A half day 'Global Future Summit' will allow delegates to hear and debate the findings of a worldwide industry opinion survey and to formulate a series of change recommendations to improve performance within their markets. The Forum also offers a Business Exchange area, where 29 Forum Partners—industry associations from around the world, including Canadian Call Management Association (CAM-X)—will host a series of meeting points and events. The Business Exchange will also house a Contact Centre Clinic with international consultants and be the focal point for social and networking activities.

For details about Forum Partnership, commercial sponsor and exhibitor options or to enquire about delegate places, contact Christina Wood, Forum Director, at +44 (0)1483 755647; Christina@ictcomms.com. **cm**

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Scanning the Canadian contact centre sector

The potential for great economic benefits from Canada's customer contact centre sector requires great leadership, comments Site Selection Canada's Steve Demmings. He sees the industry's future success as demanding improved branding and aggressive marketing.

BY STEVE DEMMINGS

According to Site Selection Canada there have been 270 new customer contact centre expansions announced in Canada in the last five years. This has resulted in an estimated 84,462 new jobs in addition to the 700,000 jobs that existed in 2000. The economic benefits are enormous. It has contributed to the leasing of an estimated 9.2-10.6 million square feet of Canadian office space and \$23.6-\$25.3 billion in annual salaries.

In the past two years both the number of deals and jobs created has trended down as companies focus their attention on smaller centres (up to 400 jobs) located in Tier Two and Tier Three cities that offer more abundant and cost effective labour. Much of the Canadian growth has been by companies that have been historically active for the past three to four years including Minacs, NuComm, Stream, Convergys, VAS, Help Desk Now, Client Logic, Sutherland, Sitel and Teletech. However, the customer contact centre sector has witnessed major new growth in Ottawa. Since their first expansion announcement in February of 2006, Dell has made two further announcements in May and November that they will eventually employ 2,700 CSR's in their new 147,000 square foot premises. The Dell business has been a nice rebound for Ottawa since the tech meltdown in 2000.

Actions for future success

Several years ago Contact Centre Canada was launched as a national human resources sector council to assist the industry in meeting its human resources challenge. Its mandate was a timely one, because the availability of employees has become "the issue" for all of Canada's industry. However, what we need sooner than later is a much more proactive and aggressive industry association that will brand Canada

as the logical global provider for a higher value, infrastructure superior, well educated solution for Technical Support and elevated Customer Service companies that seek to employ college and university graduates. This is the future! Any North American work process that can be digitized...will be digitized...in the immediate future. This will have huge implications for those countries that can offer Near Shore options for expanding U.S. business. Don't take my word for it; read Andrew Ross's best seller "Fast Boat to China, Lessons from Shanghai" to get to know our competition that is on the horizon.

Leading provinces

During the past six to seven years, the political landscape of Canada has undergone significant change. Three provinces, in particular, deserve mention. Ontario has been a consistent leader during the five year period (generating 49 percent) of the deals in Canada. Obviously the McGuinty government recognized the job creation potential of the Harris initiative because it accelerated the customer contact centre program, in virtually every Ontario com-

munity outside Toronto. Similarly, New Brunswick has announced 43 new deals (16 percent) of the Canadian total and has continued the job creation initiative in spite of two government changes.

The province that has assumed leadership for the Canadian sector is Nova Scotia. It has not only become a dominant player in Canada, but since 2000 it has achieved what the rest of the country has been talking about for years. It has created a stellar customer contact centre infrastructure and an international reputation resulting in 7,744 new jobs in five years and 24 new expansions (nine percent) of the Canadian total. They have created a new level of expectations in the economic development arena because of the Research in Motion (Blackberry) expansion. The "RIM" deal puts Nova Scotia into a different orbit than their provincial competitors. RIM offers "careers without limits" providing excellent salaries...and it creates a real solution to help Nova Scotia stem the migration of educated young graduates from the province. Hot on the RIM announcement was the Nov. 16, 2006 headline in the Globe and Mail "Halifax,

CANADIAN CORPORATE EXPANSIONS							
Summary: Comparative performance – customer contact centres 2002 - 2006							
PROV	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL	RANK
ON	31	29	23	22	26	131	1
NB	15	6	11	5	6	43	2
NS	5	9	5	2	3	24	3
QC	7	7	3	1	5	23	4
BC	5	6	4	6	0	21	5
AB	1	2	3	1	1	8	6
SK	0	1	3	3	1	8	6
MB	0	1	2	1	1	5	7
NF	1	0	0	1	3	5	7
PE	2	0	0	0	0	2	8
TOTAL	67	61	54	42	46	270	

Source: Site Selection Canada

a centre for International Finance? It's No Fish Tale." The Globe announced the creation of another 1,000 financial administration jobs with Bermuda-based companies including Bank of N.T. Butterfield & Sons, Olympia Capital International and West End Capital Management, affiliated with billionaire investor Warren Buffett.

Manitoba's lost potential

Want to understand how to destroy a business reputation that took eight years to build?

No Canadian province provides a starker image of lost economic development possibilities than the province of Manitoba, under the current NDP government. Manitoba was once a front runner in the industry, competing toe to toe with New Brunswick for most, if not all, of the new business opportunities that considered Canada as an expansion opportunity. In 2001 both provinces were in a virtual dead heat with 11,000 contact centre jobs. Since then New Brunswick has rocketed ahead with 20,000 jobs, while Manitoba has shrunk to less than 10,500. This is the direct result of an appalling lack of political leadership and a profound inability by Premier Gary Doer's NDP government to vision the economic and leveraging potential of the customer contact centre sector, as best illustrated in the lost opportunity with Research in Motion.

In order for the Canadian industry to ratchet up to the next level in creating greater employment opportunities for our educated youth and to ensure "that our lunch is not taken from us" by the competitive forces lurking on the global horizon, we must scrutinize the provincial track records that are now clearly obvious because of the past five years. Take note of the accompanying Site Selection Canada score card! Great economic benefits are possible for all of us, but this requires great leadership, now more than ever! **cm**

Steve Demmings is president of Winnipeg-based Site Selection Canada (www.siteselectioncanada.com). Site Selection Canada advises technology firms seeking new Canadian locations and advises communities on developing strategies to attain economic development results.

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Ideas at a mile a minute



The 60 Ideas in 60 Minutes keynote panel was a hit at the ICCM conference in Toronto last fall. The session was moderated by Paul Stockford, chief analyst at Saddletree Research. Panelists were: Chris Crosby, President, Latigent LLC; Garry Schultz, VP, Global Support, Roxio/Sonic; Jon Silverman, CTO, Spanlink Communications; Kevin Hegebarth, then director of Strategic Analysis, Witness Systems; Maggie Klenke, The Call Center School; and Henry Kolisnik, then senior consultant, Telus. Here are most of their suggestions organized by topic.

VoIP

Chris Crosby – The VoIP migration will wreck havoc on your reporting. Whether it's an upgrade or a full ACD replacement, there will be a significant impact to how reporting works in your new environment. Make sure to work with your vendor prior to the migration to ensure a smooth transition.

Jon Silverman – VoIP won't reap benefits unless you transform your business to take advantage of it – for example, how you route calls around the world. Business transformation is the way to take advantage of this great technology.

Deploying other technology

Silverman – Identify your subject matter experts. Show your agents the presence state of the subject matter experts that can help them handle contacts. An agent can contact the subject matter expert using instant messaging and never put the customer on hold.

Agents need time to become familiar with the technology or information. When you roll out a new software application for your agent to use to handle customer contacts, use a quality-monitoring screen recording to capture information on what training is really needed.

Maggie Klenke – Unless your IVR is as intuitive and easy to use as an ABM or a kiosk at the airport, don't move to speech recognition with that same garbage!

Don't use all 10 numbers on your IVR! You should give no more than five choices. Say

the number at the end of each instruction. Get rid of industry jargon.

Silverman – Agents have up to 20 applications on their desk. Look for a composite application. Organize your agents' desks. Put all applications into one container to speed their productivity.

Henry Kolisnik – Understand when it is the right time to invite to chat or call. For example, consider LivePerson if you're looking at multi-channel.

Silverman – Find ways to drive your customers to your website and reduce costs and time to talk to agents. Have your agents get customer's email address and send callers multiple links to your website as a voice call wrap up. Show customers how to help themselves.

Human resources

Klenke – Boost your special handling workforce or quality management by trying out agents in those positions. Give them an interim posting for six weeks to see if they would like that role and are able to handle it. After six weeks, they go back to the floor and you've done your assessment for future reference.

Regarding HR turnover, analyze your losses by supervisor team. People leave managers, not the company. There is a recruiting and hiring problem if staff leave early on. If departments steal your people, ask for some of their training budget.

More than 50 percent of supervisors

are former call centre agents. Teach them how to diagnose performance and coach. This is the great missing link.

Kolisnik – Customers have different preferences for contacting you. Give your agents SPACE – Shopping, Problem-solving, Answering questions, Collecting information (pre-shopping), Executing transactions. Recognize that they need to switch gears when shifting to a new mode.

Think about work at home as an adjunct. Agents would rather work at home if they could. There are business continuity advantages and higher retention rates. It's particularly attractive in high cost markets like Toronto.

Consider seating your supervisor ranks with an outsourced supervisor.

Crosby – Be agent for a day. It will be the most humbling experience of your career. It's a great morale booster when agents see management trying to understand their job. You will also glean a better understanding of your operations, from how the telephone works to what your customers are saying.

Kevin Hegebarth – Give some consideration to how you treat staff from a personal perspective. Give agents their own space to hang family pictures and service awards.

More often than not, customers are knowledgeable and have been to the website. Have your agents been to your

website? Let contact centre staff surf your websites so they are informed.

Tell agents their shifts are based on performance metrics or quality scores.

Disaster recovery

Crosby – Be prepared for surprise disasters such as a fibre cuts and flu epidemics. Have a secret skill group. Put together a one-page disaster recovery plan.

Measuring

Garry Schultz – Most centres still measure agent performance by traditional metrics; AHT, ASA, AWT (these are all resource planning data points). Throw out your measures and instead become experts at measuring your customer satisfaction. Ask one question: are you satisfied?

Klenke – Don't ignore variances in AHT from one period to another. If you use the same AHT for all periods, you won't achieve your SLA and you won't know why.

Hegebarth – Get behind the numbers. The industry is obsessed with statistics. Do we know what they mean? A low AHT might be really bad agents getting off calls quickly. Find out what's driving it. Look at both ends of the bell curve.

Regularly communicate strategic objectives of your enterprise. How do AHT and quality scores relate to what executives measure as the strategic value of the contact centre? They don't.

Maggie – We measure because we can. Can I directly link a measure to a company goal or mission? Know how it contributes or don't measure.

Kolisnik – Integrate bottom up metrics – (what actions to take) – with top down metrics (what is important to management).

Silverman – If you have evaluation forms, have a formal quality program. Define what quality means for your business in terms of key performance indicators or metrics. Have a key metric in the evaluation form that if that metric fails, everyone fails.

Speech analytics

Silverman – Think real-time when you

think speech analytics. If you analyze the call a day or week later, you've probably lost the customer. With real time speech analytics you have the opportunity to escalate a call immediately.

Be very careful how you design your speech recognition call flow. Capture data on how your callers use it and be prepared to spend time iterating on your call flow design. Building a successful speech recognition application takes more time than for touch tone applications. Speech recognition is better when an expert is driving it. Don't take touch-tone out. Users should have a choice.

Kolisnik – To sell speech recognition such as speech navigation internally, start at the out-of-the-box product level before getting into the big stuff.

Beyond the centre

Hegebarth – Have your IT or marketing department be an agent for a day – or week, depending how much you like them. It can bring the strategic value of the contact centre to the organization – such as gathering competitive intelligence; assessing how goods and services are perceived by customers.

Crosby – There is a great deal of information about your company that you need to monitor that is not available from a database. Like or not, customers are most likely blogging about you and filling the internet with personal product reviews. Utilize Google Alerts to monitor the internet for websites that mention your company, brand, competition, etc. Go to <http://alerts.google.com>

Klenke – Think of your contact centre as an outsourcer for your company's various departments. Bill out your services. Don't finger point. Bill back for their applications but be prepared to do whatever they ask.

Schultz – Build your maven community internally and outside the company. We've got tens of people outside of our company who take care of our customers. Help those people helping your customers.

Know your customers and bear in mind the GOA – the graying of America. Can

your mother use it? There's a 10 percent demographic that refuses to speak to anyone but the president. The Graying of America is becoming a challenge, demanding more and more services and ease of use while our budgets are plummeting.

Our industry is getting slagged and insulted by comedians, radio talk hosts, Ombudsmen and cartoonists left, right and centre. Start pushing back. Write letters. Call radio hosts.

Reports

Crosby – Consistency in communication is difficult to attain. Accumulate the different knowledge points of your call center into one-page documents. This should cover everything from how service level is calculated in your company, to escalation procedures for when systems go down. This will make it easy and intuitive for people to access the information they need when they need it. As you document topics, also move them to your intranet for easier access.

Seek and destroy Excel spreadsheets! A key metric buried on tab 34, page 67 will be missed. Tailor your reports to specific individuals. Avoid information overload and focus on reports that drive action.

Schultz – Provide one-button reports. Thirty percent of one's time is spent on compiling reports. Bring on one high powered data analyst that has the magic blend of business acumen and can craft useable reports. The target is that managers, at any level, can get the pertinent data they need to manage with just One Click.

Go one better than a graphic report. Record client calls and edit the calls in eight to 15 second snippets to focus on the point you are making. Then paste them together into a four-minute audio file to marketing. Let them hear the voice of the customer – for example comments on products or services.

And our last is also Schultz' suggestion: Question everything. Why are our hours 24/7? Why not offer windows of operation for customers to even out volume patterns? For instance, if your Erlang shows a lag in the late afternoon gently instruct customers that registrations are between two and four in the afternoon. **cm**



Measuring to better manage customers' experience

BY WENDY LAUTHER

Even defining first call resolution (FCR) as the percentage of calls resolved during the first contact made by the customer can be a matter of debate since the definition of resolved to the customer and resolved to the rep may not agree.

The percentage of calls resolved on the first contact has been much discussed in the marketplace as every company yearns to measure this accurately.

When an organization addresses FCR opportunities, the impact is far reaching. Successful FCR initiatives can save organizations 15 to 40 percent through:

- ⤵ call volume reductions
- ⤴ increases in customer satisfaction
- ⤴ increased customer retention
- ⤵ decreases in employee churn
- ⤴ increases in morale
- ⤴ optimized enterprise processes
- ⤵ decrease in escalated customer issues
- ⤴ improvements in service levels
- ⤴ increased customer response times

FCR is one of the best indicators of customer experience but it is extremely difficult to measure – let alone define. Some companies define FCR as not transferring to another area, while others try to measure the number of calls a person may place in an attempt to resolve a single issue. The most accurate measurement

comes from a small number of centres with fully deployed and robust CRM solutions. To be an effective metric, it must follow the transaction all the way to the end – across departments and people. Another trend, in an effort to support accurate measurement, is to take self-service transactions out.

Effective measuring typically begins the old fashioned way – through side-by-side observations. The most sophisticated approach to measure FCR is provided by speech analytics.

Sometimes the easiest and most readily available information to use for FCR measurement is the number of calls/transactions pended. Pended calls/transactions are those that are not completed and must be placed in a suspended or “pended” status. This is an indication of a flawed process, as it suggests numerous touches to complete a single customer issue. Companies tend to have information regarding pended issues, rather than completed issues. This allows the company to “back into” a measurement, as a pended issue is not considered resolved.

Call segmentation

Call segmentation is typically a practical starting point in understanding the type of call received, leading to the opportunities

to improve those contacts. Many times the most insightful study is one that identifies those calls which are consuming the greatest amount of time, in addition to those occurring most frequently. By analyzing the time allocation across call types you can identify FCR opportunities.

Calls with the greatest Average Handle Time (AHT) are a wonderful starting point in understanding FCR as they involve a great deal of the customer's time and attention.

The issue with a call may also be what takes place after the agent hangs up with a customer. If a commitment was made to take action, it is critical that action take place in a timely manner to prevent a follow up call on the part of the customer.

Business processes

FCR issues are typically a result of process issues and agent performance. For call backs, large backlogs and poor cycle times, most of the solutions for these issues are outside of the call centre so FCR many times uncovers process opportunities in other areas of organization. It is critical when you are approaching areas of the business to present process opportunities to have quantifiable support of the findings. Even in the event speech analytics are not available, observation data can be used. Begin the process the old fashioned way – by interviewing the management team and observing. The best way to learn about calls is through listening. Nothing can take the place of a qualified person conducting a scoring exercise.

As a general rule, business processes typically account for approximately a third of FCR issues in an organization, while agent performance tends to account for about half of the issues.

Agent performance

Ensure the environment supports FCR. Determine whether the agent or training issues are preventing resolution, while ensuring that the agent was allowed enough time to complete the call backs as promised. In addition, the business must consider if they are setting a realistic expectation for call backs.

Empower the agents for FCR success. All instances requiring escalation, authorization and forwarded must be reviewed to determine if those processes support the

larger corporate objectives.

In order to assess the performance of service providers and agents and to help deliver targeted coaching and training, the organization needs powerful analytics.

FCR is overwhelming because it is a business problem that requires tools to address. If your company cannot make the investment in the enabling perfor-

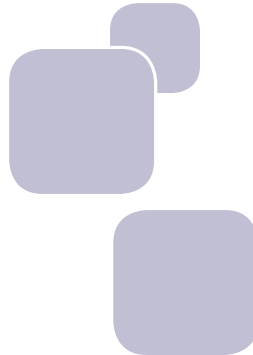
mance management tools, make sure you leverage all the time spent by the quality team to collect data, and leverage the observations/monitors completed by your management team to gain insights. **cm**

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Chasing that elusive FCR goal

Poor first call resolution (FCR) rates rank as the number one contact centre challenge facing more than a third of managers polled in Witness Systems' 2006 National Customer Service Week survey.

BY ROB MCDUGALL, P.ENG

Nearly one-third of all inquiries your call centre receives are from repeat callers. The reason is clear: customers simply aren't getting their problem resolved fully the first time. Suddenly, they become "at risk" customers more likely to defect. This almost guarantees you will face increasing customer churn and thus hurt the bottom line. Yet, organizations continue to grapple with understanding why higher FCR rates routinely elude their contact centres.

What are the five most important reasons for poor FCR rates?

1. The ability of the agent is not strong enough, which is either a training issue or a personnel issue.
2. Your company hasn't provided the authority to agents to make decisions that impact the customer, forcing a continued escalation of tedious, time-consuming, repeat calls to people who rank higher in the organization.
3. Your agents cannot find information easily that provides answers or actions for customers. This aggravating situation leads to repeated "look ups" and even giving customers incorrect information.
4. Contact centre systems don't properly process changes the agents are making, or the changes are processed so slowly that the root problem is still unresolved for too long.
5. Customer perceptions and behaviours are the causes of repeat calls. For example, customers call back trying to get a different result if their account is being suspended.

Improving FCR rates has three steps:

Step 1. Conduct an information-seeking "drill down" with experts who are proven resources. They can help determine the best approach in tackling poor FCR rates head-on.

Step 2. Track repeat calls by analyzing agent logs and the IVR system. Identify whether an issue was resolved on the first call and if not, the actual reasons for repeated calls. Look at all customer interface points, because if the customer first contacted you via self-service systems, that counts as a call.

Step 3. Make certain you provide a means to measure FCR from the first day forward. You need useful information to conduct a root cause analysis. What's one ideal outcome? Could it be one where you continue to use the technology now in place -- but making it work better for you?

For instance, consider giving your agents onscreen data that allows the agent to determine a customer is shopping around to get a better outcome. "I see a colleague of mine talked with you five minutes ago. What did she say?"

Additionally, agents can ask the customer if the first call resolved the problem:

- "Is there anything else I can do?"
- "Is this what you wanted?"

By carefully tracking agent log information, you identify specific customers and the reasons they are calling. Is it a callback or not?

With IVR systems, examine transactions

and track where calls go. Look at calls and how the IVR handles them. Too many customers merely opt to "zero out." That choice, however, isn't giving you interpretable data. Callers choose to zero out for numerous reasons, including their desire to speak with a live agent.

Don't believe that solutions such as VoIP or enhanced IVR are the Holy Grail in seeking improved FCR rates. It comes down to people talking with people.

Improvements needn't be expensive. One IBM call centre receiving one million customer emails annually discovered that by making a simple update on the FAQ page on its website, it cut email volume in half. How? IBM tracked the types of questions and applied a quick solution.

Better FCR rates remain a top but elusive ROI goal at many contact centres. Track repeat calls. Measure and analyze them using root cause analysis. Put your agents in a commanding "once and done" position, enabling them to resolve any issue within the framework of the first and single call.

Pinpointing the true causes of poor first call resolution rates is your best initial step in resolving caller issues in the first place. The end result is cost savings and improved customer retention. **cm**

Rob McDougall, president and co-founder of Upstream Works, can be reached at rmcdougall@upstreamworks.com.



Applying people, processes and technology to improve FCR

Achieving 80 percent or higher FCR rating typically results in an average of 1.2 calls needed to resolve customer's inquiry or problem. BY MIKE DESMARAIS

SQM Group's research clearly shows that FCR is the call centre measure that matters most because it reduces operating cost and revenue at risk, increases opportunities to sell and improves both employee and customer satisfaction. No call centre measure has as much impact on call centre performance as FCR. SQM's definition of FCR is – "The customer's inquiry or problem is resolved in one call" and that the customer must be the judge of determining if their inquiry or problem was resolved in the first call.

Only five percent of the call centres benchmarked by SQM are at the world class FCR rating of 80 percent or higher. The average call centre FCR rating is 67 percent resulting in an average of 1.6 calls needed to resolve customer's inquiry or problem. As you can see there is a big difference between a world class performing call centre and an average performing call centre. Listed below are the best practices for people, processes and technology for transforming your call centre into a world class FCR call centre.

FCR people enablers

The way people are trained, managed and motivated can have a significant impact on FCR.

Management – is committed to improving FCR in their mind and heart and FCR is viewed as the most important measure.

Awareness – all levels of employees (CSR to VP) are aware of why it is important to improve FCR and are also aware of their ongoing FCR performance.

Accountability – all levels of employees (CSR to VP) are accountable for achieving FCR goals.

Recognition – CSR to their direct manager level are recognized weekly and/or

monthly for achieving their FCR goals.

Financial Incentive – CSR to VP financial incentives are at least 50 percent of financial incentive payout.

Resolution Outcome – CSRs take ownership for resolving their own customer inquiry or problem calls by asking the customer if they have resolved their call.

Coaching – FCR coaching is provided at the CSR level to the VP level.

Hiring & Turnover – new CSR hires are based on having a predetermined FCR profile and call centre management focuses on reducing CSR turnover.

FCR process enablers

Establishing the right processes can also influence FCR performance.

Two Plus Calls – call centre management evaluates source of error and reasons for two plus calls.

Measurement – FCR is measured weekly and is determined by the customer.

Call Escalation – customer's problem should be attempted to be resolved with first CSR and customer should only explain their problem once and is warm transferred to the tier two CSR for call resolution.

Call Flow – customer calls are effectively and efficiently managed (i.e., call routing, script, desktop applications, etc.) for achieving FCR.

FCR technology enablers

Several technology enablers exist that can help increase FCR, and each one should be evaluated for its potential role to improve call centre FCR performance.

Intelligent Skill Based Routing – match customer and/or call type with the CSR's knowledge and skills.

Contact Channels – multiple channels accessibility means customers can contact

you anytime or anywhere.

Call Type Screen Pop-up – CSR receives an FCR screen pop-up script guideline for resolving the customer's call.

Knowledge Expert Availability via Presence and Collaboration Tools – CSRs can rapidly identify knowledge experts' availability to assist in resolving customer issues in real-time.

Roaming Knowledge Experts – knowledge experts can assist CSRs or customers for resolving calls via wireless phone technology.

Call Wrap-up Resolution – allows CSRs to capture call resolution outcomes and provide FCR and call resolution reporting.

Knowledge Management – CSR uses an online knowledge management tool as a resource to resolve customer calls.

Callback Tool – when CSRs are not available, customers can leave a message on voice menu and they are called back in the sequence in which they called.

Verification Self-Service – for verification or status update the customer can go either online to get information, or receive an email or IVR call providing real-time verification or status update information.

Customer Relationship Mgmt (CRM) – CSR has access to all customer information and history to assist in resolving customer's call.

Remember, only five percent of the call centres benchmarked by SQM are at the world class FCR rating of 80 percent or higher. The key to achieving world class FCR rating of 80 percent or higher is to execute the best practices we identified for people, processes and technology enablers. **cm**

Mike Desmarais is president & founder of Service Quality Measurement (SQM) Group. www.sqmgroupp.com / 800-446-2095.

Weaving a web of customer service

Even if most customer interactions continue to be via the telephone, can you afford to ignore the demographic and significant purchasing power of clients using non-voice channels?

BY SUSAN MACLEAN



Given the choice between phone, email, chat and web self-service, most customers will choose the former. But, companies not offering access via these other channels are likely missing out on the potential of achieving greater customer satisfaction at a lower operating cost, according to at least one industry watcher.

In the last 10 years, there has been a noted growth in interest around developing new contact channels, thereby increasing an investor's reach to existing or potential customers, reports Peter Ryan, a Montreal-based CRM analyst with Datamonitor.

"To date, the overwhelming majority of investment has been placed in voice channels, focusing on live agents or investment in IVR. However, forward looking business would be wise to also investigate the possibility of deploying non-voice channels, including web-chat, email, and text messaging so as to maximize their interaction chances," he counsels.

Ryan adds that there is no question that many potential investors have been put-off by multi-channel investment due to two key inhibitors: the perceived high cost and concern around the relatively small number of end users. However, he argues that in both cases, perception may not be reality.

Cost reduction

"While it is clear that a capital outlay for new technology associated with non-voice capabilities is required, it may not be as expensive as thought," he argues. "This is due to heavy technology innovation and economies of scale over the past five years, in conjunction with the growth of these same channels in terms of end-

users. In addition, the number of vendors providing these services has also increased during this time, meaning cost reduction due to competition."

Regarding the concern about a limited pool of non-voice channel users, he reports this is also changing. "The growth of PDAs, email accounts and web-chat users has exploded over the past decade, and many vendors are looking to connect with their customers using these conduits. What is clear is that the bulk of customer interactions will continue to be driven via the telephone, but the demographic of clients using non-voice channels are very likely to have significant purchasing power and sophistication, meaning that these channels cannot be ignored."

Ryan also contends that "in the context of Canada, it is important for contact centre managers and outsourcers to consider more non-voice deployments. With one of the highest Internet and mobile telephone penetration rates in the world, the ability for customers to connect with business across verticals will be of the utmost importance. In addition, the inability to make an investment in these technologies will end up costing both in overall revenues and customer retention."

Service differentiator

"In a world where customers regard flawless products as a given, service is the key differentiator between companies in many industries," reads a report summary of a customer service audit – *2006 Canadian Top 100 eService Survey* – of Canadian companies conducted by Talisma Corporation, a provider of customer interaction management (CIM). "Canadian companies

need to be able to provide exceptional customer service and support to customers using communication channel (such as phone, email and chat) that customers choose. Canadian companies must be committed to learn about unique needs of the customer during each interaction, assimilate that knowledge throughout the enterprise, and enable real-time access to customer information to all key stakeholders of the enterprise.

"Given that more than two-thirds of Canadian adults use the Internet to interact with a wide variety of companies and industries, ranging from banks to online shopping sites, it is imperative that companies gear up to meet service and information requests that arrive through the different Internet channels," the audit summary continues. "This is especially true for the most coveted demographic of all – over 88 percent of young, urban, high-earning Canadians are using the Internet to get their personal and professional business done."

However, the wisdom of offering multi-channel access may be questionable if that access does not offer the response times and quality that customers expect. That Talisma audit also revealed:

- nearly half of all email queries were ignored by the companies included in the audit;
- there is a lack of self-help tools, especially searchable knowledge bases;
- few companies provided online chat;
- phone service was much better but lacked personalization; and
- the majority of companies do not have access to unified customer history.

Capital outlay for new technology associated with non-voice capabilities may not be as expensive as thought, says Peter Ryan.

On the plus side, accuracy scores were very good for the responses received.

“The most pressing issue is providing a consistent customer experience across multiple channels,” the report continues. “Delays in answering phone calls and emails erode customer confidence. This erosion in responsiveness will only increase as channels such as self-help tools, text message, or online chat are demanded as a basic service by customers. What is encouraging is that providing service using the broad reach of Internet channels will only increase customer satisfaction, as well as be much less expensive to support than traditional phone.”

In fact, Talisma estimates that cost reduction can result in savings of up to 90 percent of traditional phone support costs.

According to Talisma, organisations should look to implement a multi-channel solution that can achieve the following:

- Strategically deploy communication channels using best practices as a differentiator to create enhanced experiences
- Significantly reduce the time for an agent to execute a customer’s service or support request. This would help agents

achieve higher volumes of service requests in the same time.

- Support the multi-channel delivery of customer service functions—phone, email, chat, and self-service.
- Allow continuous system modification to accommodate new products without disrupting operations
- Be easily deployable and maintainable with a low total cost of ownership (TCO)
- Take advantage of existing contact centre and CRM investments. **cm**

product showcase

Multiple channels offer service opportunities

Consumers dealing with customer service will pick up the phone because it brings them the fastest results. Yet, one study found that 70 percent of consumers say they would use instant messaging (IM) or email if the response was immediate.

That was a finding last year by Corporate Research International (CRI) of Findlay, OH, a firm that promotes IM and live web chat as the wave of the future, based on 2,213 completed surveys from a review of call centre customer service issues and preferences for contacting a company, whether by phone, email or other method.

When asked how long they were willing to wait for a response via email, 51.2 percent of the respondents said they call because they don’t want to wait, 33.83 percent said they would wait an hour or less, while only 65 percent would wait 24 hours, which is what many companies give as a turnaround time for a response.

Dr. Yat-sang Kwong, general manager and CTO at HelpSwitch Canada, finds his company’s IM solutions are a harder sell in Canada than in the U.S., although he notes momentum has been building in the last year. He says government is the fastest sector to take up IM in Canada.

For about three years, Markham, ON-based HelpSwitch Canada has offered IM solutions for customer services and email

marketing so customers can access a firm without having to download any software or be a member of, for example, AOL, Yahoo or Microsoft Messenger Network (MSN). HelpSwitch solutions complement email and 800 telephone support with real-time chats to customers, live on the web.

If you have pre-teens or teens in your home, you know why Kwong suggests IM would be particularly advisable for a company with younger clientele. In fact, the “cool” factor is cited in company literature as one of the benefits. To some extent its use depends on the age of both the targeted customer and the agent.

IM can provide more detailed and even technical information than what is readily said over the phone and a single agent can support three or four customers at a time.

Kwong says some of the challenges in adopting IM once management is convinced of the value of the tool, are some resistance by support staff and managing changes to skill sets. He suggests a company with 20 agents might have only one or two who are keyboard proficient. He recommends running a pilot of 10 or 15 percent of centre staff on IM support. Then, look at the volume and track the number of customers a single agent can support simultaneously by opening dif-

ferent windows and effectively reducing customer waiting time.

Vendors are trying to make it easy for customers to move into the web-enabled environment. Aspect Software, Inc., for example, recently released version 10.1 of its Web Powered Agent product along with a promotion through to March 2007 for Aspect Spectrum ACD customers to move to what is being billed as “a complete inbound solution that includes robust queuing, routing, reporting, agent empowerment and modeling capabilities.”

Vocalcom also has what it calls an “integrated convergence tool” to quickly gain multimedia functionalities of email, telephone, fax, Internet. Called X’Media, the Vocalcom contact centre product allows a company to centralize infrastructure in one location, which in turn is said to cut infrastructure costs, enhance productivity and provide better customer service.

Some companies offer hosted software further facilitating going beyond toll-free inbound calling. For example, CallCentre-Anywhere from Telus is a hosted service providing access to all the features of a fully functional, multi-channel contact centre without requiring a capital outlay.

It’s all about being available to customers when they want and how they want. **cm**

Self-service options prove popular

What are the most common questions your customers ask? What if they could get the answers to those questions easily via your website so they wouldn't have to phone you?

That's the idea behind IntelliResponse, an online query and answer tool developed by Comtext Systems Inc. of Waterloo, ON, and launched in 2000. Initially the focus was on servicing university students to reduce the growing number of email inquiries manually processed by staff. With limited marketing, the system spread to 23 universities and colleges in Canada. It has also been adopted at some of the world's largest commercial corporations including ING, American Express, ScotiaBank, TD Bank, National Car Rental and Budget Truck Rental. With over 125 implementations, IntelliResponse is said to have managed over 20 million inquiries, with an automated response rate exceeding 80 percent.

The online query/answer tool is like an ongoing customer survey with an unbiased, 100 percent response rate. While the original goal is to allow customers to find information quickly and easily on the website, because it also tracks the types of questions, it helps a company get to know customers better and make sure website content and company services meet their needs.

LivePerson's suite of products is said to support and manage all types of online

customer interactions from a single, unified agent desktop.

A live person on the other end of the browser gives an online shopper the control and connection they're looking for when they go online, maintains LivePerson, Inc., a New York city-based provider of solutions for managing online customer interactions including chat, email and self-service/knowledgebase. Analytics will help you read your website visitors' emotions and live chat helps you cement the relationship by supplying a human element that, generally speaking, is lacking on the web, the company contends.

The company claims that all companies that install LivePerson report a dramatic increase of online sales. It also reports that 71 percent of LivePerson consumers say they would like to find other web sites that offer live chat and special promotions.

The company predicts that consumers will lead the demand for live chat, and will ultimately force online retailers worldwide to embrace this communication channel. Will contact centres be far behind? **cm**



Benefits inside the centre

Web capabilities don't just refer to the world reaching into the contact centre. Within the centre, web-based software can enhance communication and reporting practices.

Merced Systems Inc. of Redwood Shores, CA, is a provider of contact centre and operations performance management systems. In 2006, the company commissioned a study to identify performance management practices at 107 companies in the contact centre industry who were not Merced customers.

While 95 percent of participants believed it is critical, very important or important to provide performance data to front-line employees, only 40 percent of this group provided online dashboards and reports to agents. The survey also noted that reporting and dashboard automation responses were found to correlate with an operation's performance. No companies reporting "significantly above goal" for revenue or quality reported having a fully manual dashboard and reporting system. IT priorities were cited as the top reason for not having online dashboards and reports available to agents.

Mark Gally, director of marketing at Merced Systems, Inc., cites a six to 12 month payback, five to nine percent productivity gains and sales revenue boosts of 10 to 15 percent by implementing web-based performance management software. The positive results come from automating the coaching process to develop consistency and getting a more accurate, real-time view of how the operation is being managed and how well it is performing.

He suggests supervising is a key component in a centre's performance and having better insight with clear reports and dashboards makes a significant difference. "Performance management drives behaviour change on the front line," Gally says. "Supervisors can work better with agents to drive strategic goals, rather than sit in front of a spreadsheet. They can execute on the fundamental principles better." **cm**

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Halton Region makes government more accessible



Ron MacMaster manages Access Halton, ranked the #1 government centre.

It's probably as sure as death and taxes that you've experienced frustration getting information from the government. Too often when we get to talk to someone, we've got through to the wrong person or department.

BY SUSAN MACLEAN

Thanks to Access Halton, residents and businesses in the Halton Region of southern Ontario have fast access to government-related information and problem-solving.

In 2006, Service Quality Management Group (SQM) ranked Access Halton as the number one government centre in North America and in the top five percent of all 19 SQM key performance benchmarks. SQM measured overall customer satisfaction at 83 percent with an impressive 80 percent of all customer telephone inquiries resolved in one call.

Access Halton is the corporate contact centre for Halton Region and officially provides a single integrated point of contact for regional programs and services via a local number or a toll free 1-866 number. The centre is responsible for handling calls to about 16 program areas, including those dealing with waste management, health, housing, business, seniors, transportation, children, finance and purchasing, community services and long term care facilities. But, in fact, it provides seamless single-window access to regional, provincial and

federal government information.

Halton Region was one of the first regional and municipal governments in Canada to establish such a single point of contact and typically handles an average of 23,000 telephone calls per month. It was also the first local government in Canada to deploy a CRM software application driven by a comprehensive customer service strategy, according to then chief administrative officer Brent Marshall.

The success of Access Halton likely stems from that top-ranking official's commitment to customer service. It was under his leadership in 1999 that a seamless service standardizing interaction with clients was recommended to the regional government. Marshall's focus on serving citizens seemed to gel with the culture of the organization to make Access Halton possible.

Although Marshall has recently retired, Access Halton's manager Ron MacMaster says the executive commitment and culture remain – and certainly he is bent on keeping the centre on its successful course.

Access Halton was the first municipality to develop a partnership with Service On-

tario, the province of Ontario's citizen access channel, to ensure "there's no wrong door" when someone inquires about municipal, regional or provincial issues. "We can't answer all questions, but we want to give information and send people to the right place," MacMaster explains. SQM measured 83 percent customer satisfaction among customers whose calls were transferred and dealt with by other Regional departments.

But getting to this point could not have been easy. Just for the Region, there were multiple ways of interfacing with citizens – including about 30 different telephone numbers for people to call.

"We told (departments) to give us the repeat calls so they could focus on the higher value ones," recalls Ralph Blauel, director of Technology Services in Halton Region's Corporate Services Department. "We could preserve the uniqueness of each and not pigeon hole any department."

The single most important key was having the CAO's support, adds Kate Johnston, corporate projects consultant in the office of the CAO. "Without him champi-

oning it, the roadblocks would have been insurmountable.”

She notes that they also treated each group being changed as a client, showing the benefits to them and making a point “to understand and respect their uniqueness.”

Johnston’s efforts at getting people’s buy-in cleared the path for Blauel’s team to implement the technology – specifically, public sector CRM software from Siebel (now Oracle).

The Technology Services team eventually applied it to addressing citizen issues with not only the regional government but also other organizations and the four municipalities Halton Hills, Milton, Oakville and Burlington. In fact, there are so many applications that Blauel and Johnston claim Halton Region is using Siebel/Oracle more comprehensively than the city of New York, also a Siebel/Oracle customer!

“We dove deep,” Johnston stresses. “We did it slower and with a lot of attention to detail, getting to every FAQ or client inquiry. I feel we have all clients served well through the call centre. It is a comprehensive implementation that is cost effective, collaborative and client-centered.”

For some of the most frequent municipality-related programs – such as registering a child for the local recreational program – Access Halton has an internal number linked to the municipality so the caller can be transferred over to a live person right away without redialling.

In other instances, for example a call about a body of standing water on what might be public property, a service rep could send an email out to the person responsible. “We simplified a service request by creating a linkage to the service level (regional or municipal),” says Blauel. “The result is an increased compliancy rate with respect to West Nile virus.”

Or, a complaint about waste collection... “We’ve taken the leg work away from customers to repeat stories” as a caller is transferred from person to person, says Johnston. “A service request is sent by email to the cell phones of the waste management crew who can respond remotely. This (remote response) gets uploaded to the Siebel/Oracle system, so the ticket gets closed.”

“It’s rapid and we can track response

rates,” adds Blauel.

MacMaster reports they keep an eye on the amount of calls, types of calls and talk times per division to ensure staff is allocated appropriately. “We don’t have an emphasis on handling time as long as the customer needs are met. Why rush the customer to get off the phone? It makes no sense.

“Siebel (Oracle) is a great tool for us,” he adds. “It houses the knowledge base so we can do key word searches. It stores 600 different scripts. It logs calls according to types. It communicates to other program areas, creating a “ticket” for follow up. It provides accountability.”

Callers are given a “service promise” that action will be taken within a certain time frame. Rules are in place for Seibel/

“We can’t answer all questions, but we want to give information and send people to the right place.”

Oracle to provide an alert if any promise is not kept.

Access Halton measures through its Nortel Meridian Max the volume of calls, talk time and hold time. It matches that to the data entered through Siebel/Oracle which logs every call without capturing what would be considered private information from customers.

MacMaster says they compare the two measuring systems to ensure the error rate by staff is low. At five percent, it certainly is low.

So is absenteeism and turnover.

MacMaster suggests this has much to do with being part of a larger good employer. Along with the police, ambulance staff and administrative staff in the building, the contact centre staff members have access to a cafeteria and gym facility. The centre has grown from an initial five people in August 2001 to 14 full-time and three part-time staff.

The centre runs 24/7. As part of the corporate emergency plan and essential service for Halton, the centre is located in part of the building that would remain powered during power outages so it can remain open.

MacMaster boasts that the centre’s CSRs are good at their job. He says some

centre staff see this as a foot in the door to moving on to other parts of the corporation. Others like this type of work. Five staff members are Certified Alliance of Information and Referral (AIR) specialists. He describes staff as “empathetic, well-educated, very articulate and with a drive to help. We look for good people with a desire to help.”

Recruiting begins with an initial telephone interview to listen to how the person sounds on the phone. The person is asked for previous experience and is invited to tell a story. Before being hired, a prospective employee is paired with an experienced rep whose opinion is considered in the hiring process. “People are teamed so they need to get along with

one another,” he explains.

Continuous training and updating the 600 scripts in collaboration with program areas never ends, he says. “Scripts are like paths,” he stresses. “You have to give them their freedom to let their personality show through. Otherwise there’s no job satisfaction from just reading a standard script.”

Halton has a population of just under 400,000 with a lot of growth in the last five years. “Call volume is increasing every year due to centralizing internal divisions and growth,” MacMaster says.

An IVR is used but it is “kept flat” with very few options and the ability to zero out. There is a self-serve feature for after regular office hours. “We wanted to guarantee a live answer. People don’t like IVRs. They are frustrating to a customer,” MacMaster contends.

To reflect the increasing ethnic diversity of the population, in 2005 Access Halton contracted with a language company so it could provide service in 150 languages. A conference call is placed to the service provider as required and within seconds a translator is on the line. There is also a TTY line for those with hearing impairments.

It’s obvious that Halton Region is committed to being as accessible as possible to those it serves. **cm**

Nordia reveals its VoIP strategy



Nordia Inc., one of the largest users of Internet Protocol (IP) telephony in Canada, is a provider of multi-contact customer relationship management solutions offering multilingual contact centre services 24/7. It has six contact centres across Canada with more than 2,500 employees handling 100 million customer contacts per year. Contact Management delved into its award-winning Voice over IP (VoIP) telephony structure with Pierre Grimard, vice-president Information Technology, and Lyne Magnan, sales & marketing coordinator in Quebec, PQ. Here are their responses.

What was the business case that prompted Nordia to turn to VoIP?

Nordia: We had won new contracts generating 40 percent of additional business. We needed to rapidly increase our call answering capacity, as we were facing 50,000 calls to be handled daily. Among our main objectives was that we wanted to better manage call fluctuations and to improve service level. In order to do so, we needed to optimize the utilization of all our agent workstations, regardless of their geographical locations. So, instead of buying new "traditional telephony" equipment and opening a new centre, we turned to the VoIP telephony solution. This multimedia infrastructure allowed us to link more than 800 seats and 300 "IP-ready", in our six contact centres, which can now act as one virtual contact centre to optimize the overall capacity for both voice and data service delivery.

Is there a length of time that you estimate the investment will have paid for itself?

In fact, we have already recuperated our investment, which was quickly realized in less than six months, while helping our clients by being able to quickly handle extra call volumes, thus rapidly generating new revenues for Nordia.

When did you install the VoIP technology; how long did that take and who installed it?

Nordia and its dedicated expert IT team spared no effort to carry the VoIP migration project to completion in 2005, over a period of four months, deploying one site after the other. Our strategic partners Bell Canada, our telecom provider, and Interactive Intelligence Inc., our call centre systems solutions provider, were the two important key players with whom we worked very closely.

Was it a smooth or difficult process?

The fact that we were getting 40 percent of additional business to be implemented in the same period of time was a huge challenge in itself. Having to implement an important project such as VoIP at the same time really added to the pressure. In fact, at the time we implemented it, it was the largest VoIP migration project for a contact centre company in Canada and U.S. At the same time, we also had to integrate Interactive Intelligence's call centre management CIC systems so that it would be fully tuned with our IP infrastructure. Overall, the right expertise from highly professional partners, combined with our dedicated expert IT team made it a smooth process.

How did you go about determining what VoIP technology to select? What brand did you choose? Why?

Reliability, maximum flexibility, as well as a high quality for voice passage and highly efficient equipment were key elements of the utmost importance in our choice. We found all of these qualities with Bell's latest Virtual Private Network Technology: IP-VPN links. It is based on the Layer 3 packet-routing efficiencies of Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS), a key feature of Cisco Internet Operating System (IOS) software. We found the IP-VPN a secure, robust and cost-effective way to extend the reach and coverage of our communications infrastructure. Not only does the Cisco MPLS solution provide a high level of security, it presents a cost-effective method for connecting offices, workers and business partners across geographic regions.

IP-VPNs do not simply extend a corporate network to remote locations, they can also help organizations to achieve productivity gains, while increasing network security, reliability, scalability and performance. The simplest definition of a VPN is "any network built upon a public network and partitioned for use by individual customers." According to this, public frame relay, X.25, and ATM networks can all be considered as VPNs but they are generically referred to as 'Layer 3' VPNs.

What other peripheral equipment did you have to purchase? Or was it a package deal, complete with VoIP headsets, for example?

We selected Interactive Intelligence IP approach: Session Initiation Protocol,

or SIP. Interactive Intelligence chose the international SIP standard because SIP is an alternative to TAPI-based IP telephony models, a protocol that eliminates the need for a separate IP PBX and contact centre solution and the emerging standard for session control for a variety of other communications mediums.

At that time we had to install SIP enable cards to connect our T1's and convert from TDM to SIP. We have now moved to Intel's Host Media Processing (HMP) Software, which is a 100 percent software solution, reducing costs over TDM voice boards typically required for IP telephony.

We had to acquire and install new clustered servers for reliability and stability, buy CISCO switches that manage Quality of Service over the MPLS network, to prioritize and guarantee bandwidth stability for voice packets. We also had to buy new IP phones and IP headsets for each agent position.

What changes has it brought your business?

In fact, the advantages of VoIP lie not in new capabilities, but rather in efficiencies that make changes in your operations cost-effective. Centralizing our telephony network saved us the need to integrate, upgrade and support contact centre technologies at each site. In our world of multiple services and sites, it's very complex to maintain rules for call routing, and it's expensive to maintain all systems in a dynamic environment. Therefore, Nordia being a multi-centre company, we virtualized the telephony network, using two Soft-PBX and Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) for all of our six centres. This also saves on IT support and the time

we would have spent integrating new applications (hardware/software) at four sites, which would have represented an important amount of money with traditional infrastructure. We can now choose the location/site where we want to direct the calls without having to initiate an IT project for each new service, every time. Furthermore, we linked both our Québec and Ontario centres by providing them with a virtual help desk support service, per language. Then, to cater to an unexpected call volume increase, a third site with agents having the proper qualifications, was also linked to this service.

By optimizing our workstations with the VoIP migration, Nordia experienced additional growth of more than 25 percent in annual revenues without having to open new centres. It allowed the recuperation of more than 150 workstations which, in addition to improving our cost structure, represent the equivalence of an investment of more than \$750,000.

Also, the implementation of new services, which used to take six to eight weeks, can now be set within days. With VoIP, the IT department is "no longer on the critical path" and every member of our team is proud of having removed that pressure off our shoulders.

Reduction of the number of T1's by nearly 15 percent was made possible via line sharing and the integration of several services on a same SIP soft-switch. This represents an important annual saving on our telecom spending. Significant savings were also achieved for public Internet access going down from five to two points of access. Equipment reliability has im-

proved and we have a better control over Internet filtering, thus reducing the risks of virus intrusion and loss of productivity.

Linking agents at multiple sites into common queues allows us to reduce hold times, reduce staffing levels or achieve some measure of both. It also enabled agents to request assistance from coaches or transfer calls to other sites in a transparent manner.

How has staff reacted?

Even though it was essentially transparent to call centre agents, we made sure that our staff understood the various advantages that this migration project would have on Nordia's business, for instance, that it is a strong competitive advantage in the market. So, this project was introduced gradually in the company and the reactions were very positive. Of course, this new technological environment (and other factors) called for a change in our organizational IT structure. We wanted to make sure to leverage our technical workforce in all of our centres and to better balance the IT scope of work. Therefore, the Nordia IT workforce has become a unified unit, which was also well received at all sites.

How have your clients reacted?

The VoIP virtual infrastructure allows for reduced hold times and increases our capacity to handle more call volume. These key factors have significantly improved our service, thus contributing to increasing our clients' satisfaction.

Also, one of the advantages of VoIP

see **VoIP watch** page 22



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is that you can call anywhere, anytime without paying extra phone charges, thus reducing long distance charges. For example, one of our clients has been the beneficiary of a very robust economy of \$500,000 annually in long distance charges. Since a cost-effective solution is always “music to a client’s ears”, of course, the reaction was very positive.

Finally, in case of a disaster recovery plan deployment, operations are simplified when it comes to quickly transferring call volumes to other locations. In addition, the Nordia corporate network is designed to continue operations even when there are failures along a particular path – thus increasing reliability of IP-VPNs since they are riding on highly reliable infrastructure. These elements have a direct impact on the business continuity and the guarantee we can provide to our clients that the same high level of service can be maintained at all times, in a transparent manner.

How did you handle the controversy about security issues?

In fact, the security aspects of our business have significantly improved by simplifying its management and reducing to a minimum its vulnerability to attacks and intrusions. IP-VPNs allow the use of private IP addresses, thus increasing both security and flexibility. Private IP addresses are similar to internal telephone extensions in a PABX with the IT Manager controlling the numbering of devices on the network. Well-programmed firewalls at selected points on the network are used to grant and manage only accesses for those who have been authorized.

Since the underlying IP-VPN secures and encrypts all data automatically, IT management can avoid spending time ensuring confidential corporate data are secure or encrypted before they are transmitted to a remote user, partner or branch office. As for Voice over Internet, unlike public VoIP services, all our communications are transported only on Nordia’s secured private network.

Any lessons learned?

The deployment of new technology, as usual, has impacts in more areas than

expected. One area in particular is the management style which needs to adjust to the virtualization and the deployment of VoIP in multiple centres. The technology allows to seamlessly distribute calls between various centres and you have to deploy the management structure to track, measure and manage a service de-

livered by multiple parties and locations. Traditional pyramid style management has to migrate to a more complex matrix of responsibility and delivery process to ensure delivery of services. For an out-sourcer like Nordia with multiple centres serving multiple clients, the complexity can quickly increase.

By optimizing our workstations with the VoIP migration, Nordia experienced additional growth of more than 25 percent in annual revenues without having to open new centres.

A migration needs to be well planned with partners aligned to the same key milestones and project schedule.

Keep the number of providers as low as possible, as it can become very complex and difficult to troubleshoot problems with your voice environment if some components are provided by non-certified or non-compatible third parties.

Any further words of advice?
Do not perform this migration for bad reasons. A complete evaluation of the potential savings is required. In the call centre world, savings are more associated to flexibility, expansion and virtualization of centres. In standard business telephony, savings are often related to reducing the MACs (moves-adds-changes).

Several people, after experiencing similar technology with public (home) VoIP telephony, may be afraid that the voice quality could be diminished. The reality is that there is actually no difference. Calls are processed on a private network that, when properly set up, guarantees that your voice packets are always prioritized and not scrambled. The quality results

we automate or streamline when much larger changes could be done by reviewing the complete process and envisioning the new possibilities brought by technology.

reside in the expertise of the IT resources performing the configuration and fine tuning of the environment. In fact, the clarity of voice is often better, with a much better noise reduction efficiency.

The technology changes are a good occasion to review business processes and to improve the delivery of services. Often, We are dealing everyday with clients requiring highly secure system, transparent and flexibility of service, cost-effective solutions and improved productivity. There were no questions in our minds that the VoIP telephony system was definitely going to help fill those needs. Plus, Nordia belongs to a global family of contact centre businesses with over 5,000 employees on three continents and, to stay ahead of competition in a global market, we understood that flexibility is key and that contact centres must foster innovation and respond to market challenges quickly and efficiently. Furthermore, as the trend toward outsourcing contact centre operations grows, and as IP allows call-by-call management of outsourced agents, we believe that VoIP will play a large role in uniting internal and outsourced customer service operations, anywhere on earth! Therefore, the implementation of a VoIP structure was not even a question of choice, but one of survival. It is no longer only a question of whether or not you have the right expertise and workforce to meet your contract requirements, but it is a question of whether you are able to provide the right technology to cater to the market’s ever changing and increasing needs. VoIP is definitely the “voice” of the future and a must competitive advantage. **cm**

BC quality of life attracts skilled, multilingual labour

The multilingual and highly skilled labour along with the different lifestyles of the rural community mean BC has lots to offer the contact centre industry.

"BC offers a hugely multilingual workforce," says Jean Mitchell, president, BC Contact Centre Association (BC CCA) and manager of Call Centre & Industry Training Solutions at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). "Every language is spoken here, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish and German. There are large U.S. outsourcing centres with proximity to the U.S. market. That market requires Spanish as a second language and BC has no trouble filling that requirement."

However, BC contact centres are looking for people, Mitchell admits. She reports that the rural areas are doing well with centres in Victoria, Kelowna, Prince George, Vernon, Chilliwack and Nanaimo. Meanwhile, Dale Wheeldon, director of Economic Development, Chilliwack Eco-

nomics Partners Corporation in Chilliwack, BC, is very upbeat about areas as well.

"While no doubt some of our existing centres are experiencing issues around labour availability due to the improved economy in BC, I believe that opportunities still exist for small specialty contact centres in some of our member communities, specifically Mission, Cowichan, Comox, Maple Ridge and Osoyoos," he notes. "Some of the existing centres that are having the challenges still remain some of the most productive centres in North America."

Wheeldon is chair of Linx BC, an economic development initiative founded by the Province of BC and several BC communities in 1998 to create opportunities in high unemployment communities by attracting call centres to the province. It brought in 10 call centres which netted over 10,000 new jobs and a total annual income estimated at US\$283 million! The annual indirect benefits of these centres

have been estimated to be over US\$500 million. That group's focus has now been turned to other economic sectors.

Another BC strength is that it offers easy access to the U.S. border. Mitchell says a global strategy is to have a centre here and another in Asia.

The local industry is supported by BC CCA, the active provincial association. BCIT, the polytechnic institute in Burnaby, BC, offers the BCIT Call Centre & Industry Training Solutions program, which Mitchell manages. Its Call Centre of Excellence is a working call centre designed to help give companies and individuals the edge in this fast-growing sector. Companies can try out the latest technology. Call centre managers can add to their operations to handle overload during busy times. Through BCIT's Call Centre of Excellence Training Series, individuals can build the job skills needed to succeed as call centre agents, supervisors and managers. **cm**

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MCCA – Manitoba Customer Contact Association

MCCA chair Lilly Kaminski writes in her new year message to members: "MCCA assists the industry through proactive human resource programming that will enhance members' chances for global success. Government officials at our MECCA Awards recently boasted about the outstanding job MCCA is doing for this industry and applauded us for being

recognized as a leader in Canadian industry associations. One example cited was Manitoba being a first in Canada to introduce a University Level call centre management training program, and taking a proactive approach to human resource development. In our busy schedules, we often overlook and take for granted what work is happening behind the scenes at MCCA to strengthen our global positioning."

The Manitoba Customer Contact Association celebrated its eighth annual MECCA (Manitoba Excellence in Customer Contact Achievement) Awards night November 16, 2006 at the Canad-Inns-Polo Park with over 300 industry guests sharing in the enthusiasm and excitement. Lilly Kaminski, Chair of MCCA, opened the evening along with guest The Hon. Jim Rondeau, Minister of Science Technology Energy and Mines. Another guest was Kyle Janota from Contact Centre Canada. Arvel Gray was the Master of Ceremonies for the evening which included a performance by Brazilian Dance troupe Viva Capoeira.

The awards program is intended to recognize excellence and evoke pride in the customer contact centre industry. Congratulations to all the winners!

Representative of the Year Awards went to: Johanne Absalom, Archway Marketing; Teri McDowall, CAA Manitoba; Barbara Custance, Canada Post; Nicole D'Auteuil, CN; Patricia Bradley, Convergys Canada; Lucille Gregory, CUETS; Edgar Ruiz, E-Care Contact Centers Ltd.; Sue Smith, Fineline Solutions; Kristi Fecyk, Great West Life; Muriel Tweed, Health Links - Info Santé; Marie Paule Palud, Integrated Messaging; Lindsay Robinette, Manitoba Hydro; Peggy Campbell, Manitoba Public Insurance; Lola Lewis, MTS Allstream; Rindalah Hijazi-Figueroa, RBC Royal Bank; Tracy Doyle, The City of Winnipeg; and Linda Panciera, The Faneuil Group.

Manager of the Year Awards were given to: Nadine Laborde, Archway Marketing; Nellie Guy, CAA Manitoba; Ruth Honeygham, Canada Post; Ken Carroll, CN Customer Support Centre; Trevor Burns, Convergys Canada; Stuart Eckert, CUETS; Sharleene Viray, E-Care Contact Centers; Shawn Knox, Fineline Solutions; Sarah Rogers, Health Links - Info Santé; Shelley Garand, Manitoba Hydro; Brian Byczkowski, RBC Royal Bank CCC; and Bill Wilson, The Faneuil Group.

Organization Awards were presented in five categories.

Community – CUETS; MTS Allstream
Environment – Health Links-Info Santé; MTS Allstream

Technology – CAA Manitoba; Archway
Training & Performance Management – Integrated Messaging Inc.; Convergys Canada
Employee Satisfaction – CUETS; RBC Customer Contact Centre

MECCA also honoured its five-year volunteer committee members: Craig Johnson, CDI College; Carolyn Welsch, McDaniels Executive Recruiters; and Alex Herriot, Custom House.



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Innovative Contact Centre Solutions

MECCA reports that another study session has begun in the Certificate in Interdisciplinary Studies: Customer Contact Centre Management. University of Manitoba Extended Education and MCCA have designed a program specifically for contact centre managers, supervisors, team leads, trainers, CSR's and quality assurance managers who wish to advance in their career or pursue a career change in the industry. Students must complete 100 course hours from the University of Manitoba and 100 course hours from the MCCA to receive a certificate. For more information about the program, individual courses, contact MCCA's training coordinator Lynn Riddell 975-6465 or lynnriddell@mcca.mb.ca.

Alberta Call Centre Association

REPORT BY SCOTT MACKENZIE

Come join us at the ninth Annual ACCA Conference May 14-16 at The Coast Plaza Hotel in Calgary, AB, as we highlight the "Best In Class, Getting There and Staying There." Expect a dynamite three days of call centre tours, seminars and keynote presentations headlined by Tom Blake and his insights on "Winning Organizations"! Also featured are a fun-filled karaoke night, gala dinner and wine tasting event, great prizes, and a dynamic tradeshow. Be sure to check out our website at www.abcallcentre.com for more information and register early. We look forward to seeing you in Calgary on May 14!

GTACC - Greater Toronto Area Contact Centre Association

REPORT BY SANGEETA BHATNAGAR

GTACC is a non-profit knowledge exchange and networking association with industry, government and service provider representation. Founded in 2002, GTACC meets on a quarterly basis to share information on industry related topics, keeping its membership on the leading edge of industry issues and initiatives. Furthermore, GTACC supports the Greater Toronto Area Marketing Alliance with positive, sustainable marketing initiatives for the Greater Toronto Area customer contact centre industry.

GTACC is about networking and communication, people assisting people. Membership is free. Sponsorship and donations are welcome.

The latest meeting was Sept. 20, 2006 at 8:00 am. Brian Villeneuve allowed us to book our meeting at BCE Place, 161 Bay Street, Suite 4040, Toronto. This was another fun, information driven, networking opportunity with leaders from our community! Elizabeth Winter, CPA, spoke on "Absenteeism in the Workplace" and shared a lot of excellent information!!! Our second speaker also came very highly recommended - Lilly Krstic, Subject Matter Expert with TELUS. Lilly engaged the membership with information on "Contingency planning for Call Centres."

Our first GTACC meeting for 2007 is set for February 28 at 8am -10am, at 161 Bay Street, BCE Place – Suite 4040. We are fortunate to have Afshan Bye, from Switchgear Consulting come and speak for us. Afshan is very active with Contact Centre Canada where she is an active member and sits on the Board. She was most recently head of ING DIRECT Funds and just prior to that was SVP of sales and service at ING DIRECT Canada.

Afshan will be speaking on the challenge that so many call centres face – ATTRITION with the front line representatives. Afshan will share lessons that she has learned that have led to effective management of agent turnover/attrition. We look forward to having a tremendous information session, great networking as well as meeting up with our peers to have some fun!!! Once again, Brian Villeneuve has been kind enough to get us the beautiful location with some great coffee to start the morning off!

For details contact chairperson Sangeeta Bhatnagar at sangeeta@gtacc.ca or visit GTACC's new web site: www.gtacc.ca

coming events: 2007

FEBRUARY 28: GTACC 8am-10am., 161 Bay Street, BCE Place – Suite 4040. Greater Toronto Area Contact Centre Association speaker and networking session; www.gtacc.ca

MARCH 28: BC CCA Call Centre Tours, Vancouver; www.bccallcentre.com

APRIL 17: Symposium 2007 AMR-Postes Canada, Montréal, PQ; www.amrq.com

APRIL 25 - 27: Contact Centre Global Forum, Palais des Congrès, Cannes, France; www.ccglobalsforum.com

MAY 14 - 16: Alberta Call Centre Association ninth annual conference, Coast Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre, Calgary, AB. www.abcallcentre.com

MAY 15 - 16: MCCA AGM, trade show & conference, Winnipeg, Man.; www.mcca.mb.ca 204-975-6464

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