

Call Center Times

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STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE: HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU AND HOW CAN YOU COPE? By Peter B. Polatin, M.D.

The workplace has become ever more demanding of our time and effort. With the increased efficiency and productivity brought to us by the computer and communication innovations of recent years, you would think that life would be easier. But we have been carried into an increasingly frantic work-day by the need to master ever more complicated technology; to be quicker, faster and more innovative; and to advance and make more money. There is less time for lunch, for leisure, for family. Even when we are away from the job, we can be reached or hooked into a weekend project by computer and the internet.

With work demands more and more intrusive in our lives, we may experience subtle but progressive symptoms of physical and psychological stress. What is stress? In a more simple life, it is the threat of bodily harm that induces us to a "fight or flight" response. If you are

threatened or cornered, either you fight your way out of it, or run away as fast as you can. While being threatened, you start to breathe faster. Your heart races. Your skin becomes clammy or you begin to sweat. You have a feeling of dread or intense anxiety. And you are watching things very intensely, waiting for your moment to break away or strike out. But what if you aren't really cornered in that way? You just have deadline after deadline to meet. Or you have a boss who is continually looking over your shoulder and expecting you to produce. You're not really being physically threatened, but it feels the same way. And you may begin to have the same symptoms.

Stress is also associated with irritability. You are less patient with friends and family, and generally have a "short fuse," so that people start avoiding you or treading very lightly when they are around you. There may also be emotional lability. That is,

one minute you're having a conversation, and the next you're crying for no apparent reason, or raging about a seemingly innocuous event.

Stress can cause a disturbance in sleep, appetite, or libido. You might stay up all night worrying about the project that's due in two weeks. Food no longer tastes good, or it tastes too good and you're eating all the time and starting to gain weight. You lose your interest in sex and just don't want to have anything to do with your

"significant other," or develop an inability to become aroused or to perform sexually. You may become distracted easily, and lose your train of thought or be unable to complete a project. Concentration may suffer. Memory for recent events become impaired.

With prolonged stress, people may develop a depression, with a feeling of sadness that lasts most of the day every day, or a loss of any enjoyment in daily activities. They may have thought of death or suicide, feelings of unworthiness or inadequacy, or the conviction that they deserve to be punished for what they consider to be their faults and misdeeds. They withdraw socially and may become functionally impaired so that they are unable to work.



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Stress in the Workplace cont'

Many physical illnesses, such as asthma, hypertension, peptic ulcer disease, irritable bowel syndrome, and urticaria (rashes) are precipitated by or worsened by stress. When you go to the doctor for a cure for bothersome physical symptoms, the last thing you want to hear is "try to relax," but it is frequently your general physician who picks up the fact that you are under stress, because he understands that the relationship between the mind and the body. However, equally true these days is the fact that most physicians are also under stress because they need to see larger numbers of patients in a clinic or office, and don't have time to fully explore with you what is going on in your life.

What can you do to deal with stress? First of all, you need to recognize the symptoms, as noted above. Then, you should try to identify the specific stressors. Is it the

workplace, or some other part of your life? Is it the constant deadlines, or the hours? Is it your supervisor or your co-workers? Or is it the job itself? Are you happy doing what you're doing? Some things you can change, other things you just have to live with. But it's important to know exactly why you are experiencing stress.

Once you have identified the stressors, you need to try to decrease your reactivity. First of all, ask yourself why that particular thing is upsetting to you. Sometimes, just having an internal dialogue can defuse the problem. "I'm upset because I have to get this report out by the end of the day, and it's a lot of work, and I don't think I can do it. But I have to do it, so instead of worrying about it, I am going to do the best I can". Other techniques may also be useful. Distraction is accomplished by blocking

any thoughts about the stressful event, and instead focusing your mind on pleasurable things, such as a day at the beach or a good movie you saw recently. Self modulation to induce relaxation involves deep breathing and inducing a calmer state. Ventilation by talking to a close friend, a colleague, or a spouse can help to defuse the

immediate situation,

and allow time for problem

solving. Re-

structuring involves re-

interpreting the stressful

Situation so

that it is less immediately threatening. "I have this deadline, but this is also an opportunity for me to demonstrate my competence, and I am going to take advantage of it".

If coping strategies fail to fully control your stressors, you should consider seeking professional help. Many employers have "Employee

Assistance Programs" (EAPs), with counselors available to help employees deal with stress. If you have an insurance plan, look for a list of therapists in the directory. It doesn't have to be a psychiatrist, unless medication is required. A psychologist, licensed professional counselor (LPC), or social worker may be competent to help you get your stress under control. Biofeedback, relaxation training, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and psychotropic medication are all potentially useful, short-term techniques to resolve symptoms of stress.

One thing not to do is just live with it. If you are becoming incapacitated by symptoms of stress, you must take charge of your life and get it under control. If you remain passive, you won't get better, and you might get worse. ■





A CASE STUDY

In a quiet and almost unnoticed way, a technology innovation has been gaining ground and use in Call and Contact Centers across the globe. While the debate of the analysts and industry pundits rages on as to the effectiveness, application or acceptance of real-time communication within the enterprise, a number of Call Centers are using this simple, yet powerful tool to increase productivity and better manage workflow and information.

One clear example of this is Verizon Online's network operations center (NOC) in Texas, which used to look like all busy NOCs—chaotic. Some staffers were teleconferencing, others waving their hands to get a co-workers' attention, and the displays were filled with network information and e-mail messages.

Today, the pace at the national ISP is still fast, but it's less frantic, thanks to an application many once

dismissed as just for consumers—instant messaging (IM). Verizon is using NetLert Communications' NetLert Instant Messaging server and clients so in-house operations staff and Verizon's engineering staff can work together on network problems in real time. Messages are recorded and logged in the server during IM transactions. The logged messages can be used for solving future problems, while the log data can be used for management reporting.

Kevin Lee, the group manager of operations says, "With our 24-by-7 NOC, we were always trying to reach multiple people at once, and we had a hard time managing the work load. We were also getting a lot of phone calls from within the company and we were always teleconferencing with engineering." But telephone conferences tended to get

confusing and e-mail wasn't real time enough. "We really wanted to open up the line of communications in the staff so that everyone was on the same page with who was doing what with whom to which project."

Keith Longabaugh, the NOC duty manager for operations support, agrees. "We wanted a way to talk with each other in real-time," he says, "while at the same time being able to have a techbridge (Verizon internal teleconference) or work on a project."

Before instant messaging, when supervisors at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Customer Contact Center needed to make announcements to their entire staff, they had to shout above the din of agents on the phone, interrupting current calls.

"Of course, this is very disruptive, work flow is interrupted, and the



customers on the phone could hear all that was going on," said Robert Moss, director of the call center. These days, the center uses NetLert Instant Messaging, a real-time communication product from NetLert Communications. Instead of barking important announcements across the noisy room, supervisors can simply and quickly type the message and send it to every agent's computer screen. "With instant messaging, important information could be communicated without interrupting current phone calls and work flow," Moss said.

The call center fields inquiries about Texas' parks,



Case Study cont'

including booking campsites and other types of reservations, so when uncertain weather invades the state, callers keep the lines busy. "Since park visitors are usually exposed to the elements, it becomes very important to communicate up-to-the-minute weather information," Moss said. "With NetLert IM, we can draft messages and even send Web links directly to the agents so that they have the most accurate and timely information possible." Other common inquiries to the call center refer to hunter and boater education and hunting and fishing license sales. Customers contact center staff through telephone, Internet, e-mail and fax.

More than just "Instant Messaging"

Of course, any IM service can provide real-time communication. But, as in Verizon's case, the company needed more. Specifically, it wanted a system it could

host itself that provided instant messaging with no latency. "We wanted to host messages for the whole staff and to get them to everyone as fast as possible," Lee says. "AOL Instant Messaging (AIM) did only the last part of the job." And AIM lacked other features such as tight security and in-house message storage. Though outsourcing instant messaging to one of the large providers would be free, Verizon Online wanted to manage and maintain its own-hosted system. That way, the company would be immune to outsourced host outages and most IM worm attacks and spam assaults.

Verizon wanted a package that gave the NOC centralized management, a universal team message folder and the ability to use any user name. (On the public hosted systems like Yahoo Messenger, easy-to-recognize names have long been taken.) Verizon also wanted an alarm function for

critical messages, and an in-house server system. Last, but far from least, it wanted security.

Security Blanket

Verizon's in-house IT staff started evaluating IM server/client combinations in April of 2001. It looked at Microsoft Messenger, AIM, Yahoo Messenger, NetLert IM and several others. Verizon did not, however, look at open source IM systems such as Jabber. "We wanted something that was proprietary that we could control and own," says Lee. Message content security and control over message logs were the most important issues. While the remotely hosted services had many of the features Verizon was looking for, they had neither the security nor the centralized management the NOC needed. NetLert IM, however, was built from the ground up to be hosted internally and uses SSL to secure all IM sessions.

"Security should be a major concern for organizations

using instant messaging products, especially those hosted by a third party", said Danny Councill, president of NetLert Communications. However, most organizations put security on the backburner to keep costs low. He said many free instant messaging products compromise organizations. "It's just an open port access into an enterprise, and yet a lot of these organizations are still using their free services," he said.

NetLert IM has three layers of security. "It resides behind the corporate firewall, so unless you are going outside that firewall, you're not opening up your system to any kind of intrusion," Councill said. For those instances when NetLert IM is used beyond the firewall, via the Internet, messages use SSL encryption and the application uses specific ports on the network that have already been secured for other products.

Organizations may customize NetLert IM to meet their needs. For



Case Study cont'

example, they can limit access to certain functions, allowing some users to only receive information while others can post, send and receive information. They can even dictate how the product looks on the user's screen, including whether alerts hide under current screens or immediately pop up on top of current applications.

IM saves time and money

Longabaugh estimates, "On the average we're saving 30 minutes to an hour per day per person." At that rate, even at NetLert's maximum cost of \$40 a seat a year, Verizon Online was saving money within the deployment's first two days

Meanwhile, back at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Customer Contact Center, weather and other office-wide announcements are sent using NetLert IM's alert function. The call center also uses the instant chat feature to communicate among individuals. For example,

when an agent is presented with a question he can't answer, he must refer it to a supervisor. So, instead of wasting time searching for the manager in his office or on the floor, the agent merely sends the question to the manager and receives an answer via the instant chat feature of NetLert. The feature also works with pagers and cell phones, so managers are available even when they are not sitting in front of their computers.

"With IM, the user is presented with the information immediately," said Moss. "There is little to no lag time from the time the messages are sent."

In addition, the call center uses the product's polling feature. Danny Councill, NetLert president, said one of the most common uses for polling is finding out when employees will be available for a meeting. The supervisor sends the question to applicable employees. The recipient is presented with a

variety of response options, depending on the supervisor's preference. The sender can offer only a yes or no response, or allow a custom response option. The product then automatically tallies the responses, showing percentages for each possible response.

"On a question like that you can find an answer in less than a few minutes," said Councill.

In addition to collecting and tallying polling results, NetLert confirms receipt of alerts, showing the sender who has or has not received and read the announcement. "If somebody's online it will tell [the sender] that they received it," said Councill. "If they're offline it will then say this person's offline. Depending on the urgency of the alert, I need to now take another method to make sure these people get it."

The future

Verizon today isn't using all of NetLert IM's capacity. The company, for example, first elected to use NetLert IM's own user directory and is only now hooking NetLert IM's user directory into the Windows NT domain model. NetLert can also be used with LDAP or Novell Directory Services . Additionally, Java-based NetLert can run on every client OS from OS/2 to Linux to Macintosh.

In the six months since NetLert went to work for Verizon, the company has had no complaints about its IM system. "No problems with it whatsoever," says Longabaugh. "It's turned our NOC from chaos to organized chaos."

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'TID BITS'

QWIZ AND HIRERIGHT PARTNER TO OFFER COMPLETE SUITE OF PRE-EMPLOYMENT SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT SERVICES

Qwiz Inc. and HireRight have announced a partnership that joins Qwiz's pre-employment and skills assessment services with HireRight's innovative, Web-based employment background and drug screening services. Specifically, the partnership affords human resources departments of Global 2000 companies access to more than 500 different behavioral, personality and skills assessments from Qwiz and access to comprehensive background and drug screening services from HireRight including criminal, employment, education, credit and motor vehicle report checks. All services can be ordered and managed via the Web.

According to Qwiz President and Chief Operating Officer,

Noel Sitzmann, "In our most recent survey about online testing trends, over 80 percent of the respondents said they use online testing to save them time and to make better hiring decisions." Sitzmann also said, "Many human resource executives have traditionally used both background and assessment services and now seek these services online as well. In response to that, we've partnered with HireRight to make it easier for organizations to make the right hiring decision the first time."

In addition to testing "hard skills" such as software application proficiency, Qwiz offers "soft skills" testing such as sales aptitude and customer service competency. Qwiz also provides human resource professionals with valuable skills testing programs that rank a candidate's fit for a given position based on company set parameters.

"Today's human resources

managers need not trust intuition when making hiring decisions but rather can make decisions based on hard data that goes further to ensure that they consistently hire the best person for the job. Our partnership with Qwiz translates to a win-win for customers who are looking to do exactly that," said Eric Boden, president and chief executive officer of HireRight. ■

MsourceE Spanish Language Center Opens in Mexico

MsourceE Corporation, a leading provider of IT-enabled services, has announced the opening of its call center operations in Tijuana, Mexico. This is the first operational center by MsourceE outside India. The Mexico center has been set up with an initial investment of \$1 million and will service the requirements of one of MsourceE's large financial services clients in the US. The Mexico center has an initial capacity of 50-100 seats, with a capacity to expand to 300 seats and will offer both voice and

non-voice activities. The center currently houses 51 Full Time Employees (FTE) and has a 16x7 operation. The center plans to have a 24x7 operation by April 2003.

Commenting on the Mexico center, Mr. Jerry Rao, Chairman, MsourceE said, "The center represents a big step forward for us and underscores our commitment to be a quality global BPO player. This is a significant step towards expanding our portfolio of services and providing our clients in North America alternate language capabilities. The experience gained from our Mexico operations will be invaluable as we expand to other parts of the globe."

Arthur Flew, Vice Chairman, MsourceE said, "Apart from serving the Spanish language requirements of our North American clients, the Mexico center will provide location redundancy outside India. We have performed seamless transfer of best practices from India to the new center in Mexico to ensure



'TID BITS'

consistency of service provided by us. This is our first operational center outside India and our third worldwide. We have translated our in-house training programs with customization for the Mexican environment and culture and our operational procedures are prepared in line with ISO 9001 2000 guidelines."

The Msource Mexico Center is equipped with a data center, training rooms, cafeteria and other support facilities. The center has direct connectivity to the Msource telecom center in El Segundo, California and is built on the same architecture as the other Msource centers in India - thereby providing ease of integration. Currently, Msource Mexico has begun providing inbound customer service functions, and will shortly be expanding to include all voice processes (inbound and outbound) and non-voice capabilities. ■

Synergistix Introduces C.A.T.S. Tablet PC Edition

Synergistix Data Solutions (www.synergistixdata.com) has introduced the Tablet PC version of their Call Activity Tracking System (C.A.T.S.), a sales force automation and customer relationship management tool designed to help pharmaceutical companies effectively plan and track activities with physicians, pharmacies, and hospitals in their territories.

With the recent launch of Microsoft XP Tablet PC Edition, Tablet PCs have become even more popular with business professionals who have jobs that require them to be constantly on the move. That includes pharmaceutical sales representatives, for whom C.A.T.S. was primarily designed. A proprietary sales force automation and customer relationship management solution, C.A.T.S. provides pharmaceutical firms and their sales forces with

current territory and market intelligence through handheld computers.

Ultra slim and lightweight, Tablet PCs don't need to be opened or turned on; however, they offer a full version of the Microsoft Windows XP operating system. Tablet PCs also offer handwriting recognition and are dictation capable.

"More and more pharmaceutical firms are expressing an interest in Tablet PCs for their sales forces," says Don Schenker, president and CEO of Synergistix. "Now that the C.A.T.S. system runs on all Windows-based hardware platforms, our customers have the flexibility to choose what hardware is best for their sales force, from the small Pocket PC to the full-sized Tablet PC."

Schenker continues, "Additionally, due to our open architecture, we have the ability to run a combination of hardware devices at the same time for different sales reps on the same sales force, providing a seamless migration path from the

Pocket PC to the Tablet PC."

As government and industry move to heighten enforcement of sample accountability, compliance with the Prescription Drug Marketing Act (PDMA) has become an increasingly vital issue for pharmaceutical companies and their sales forces. The C.A.T.S. Tablet PC Edition helps pharmaceutical reps improve productivity, increase sales effectiveness and achieve better sample accountability by automatically capturing information at the point of contact, eliminating paperwork. It also offers reps instant access to up-to-date records on every physician and allows them to record their sample calls as well as the physician's signature on the spot, storing the information electronically. This eliminates the risk of record-keeping errors and lost documents.

The C.A.T.S. Tablet PC Edition connects the sales force with the home office and provides them with unprecedented flexibility, functionality and ease-of-use. With this tool,



pharmaceutical reps can leverage all of their home office's resources, including marketing research and client-specific data, in one small, handy device.

C.A.T.S. can also enforce federally mandated and customer-defined business rules that provide for compliance in sampling to physicians and detailing hospitals and pharmacies. A secure digital signature function assures that physician sign off cannot be copied, duplicated or breached. Additionally, a suite of Web-based reporting tools enables managers to run sales productivity and system metrics reports via the Internet.

"Tablet PCs are truly a next-generation sales tool. C.A.T.S. adapts especially well to the Tablet PC format, and it will help make the pharmaceutical rep's job even easier," says Schenker. "The Tablet PC also lends itself to video and animation, which can enhance the entire call experience by maintaining

physician interest and extending the amount of doctor-rep face time." ■

InStranet Enables Managers to Quantify Effectiveness of Sales, Marketing and Channel Documents and Content

InStranet, Inc., provider of Content-Based Applications for the enterprise, has announced the release of version 3.2 of its Channels In-Line (CIL) application featuring built-in analytics. With a strong emphasis on feedback and measurement, these analytics enable managers to make informed sales and marketing decisions based on market pressures, competition and channel needs. Now, in addition to publishing and syndicating information, companies can measure its effectiveness in real-time, helping drive increased revenue across multiple channels, including the internal sales organization, partners, web sites and resellers.

According to a recent

Forrester report, "Mastering Marketing Measurement" (September 2002), Jim Nail has stated that, Marketers must crack the measurement barrier. ... What return am I getting from my marketing budget?

What mix of tactics and communication channels delivers the highest return?

Old attitudinal-based metrics like awareness and purchase intent don't

provide the answers. But more data, processing power, and analytical tools have emerged...

Clinton Stark, director of U.S. marketing for InStranet, points out that traditional methods for managing the distribution of business critical information, both inside and outside the enterprise, typically rely on manual, inefficient systems. As a result, managers have struggled with a piecemeal approach using faxes, email, postal mail, and in some cases, web sites.

Unfortunately these methods provide no way to measure or evaluate the overall effectiveness of sales and marketing programs. Worst of all, they are expensive and not secure, Stark added.

"Measurement and feedback is the second half of the document and content challenge," said Stark. "With the tremendous volume of web publishing to the channel, our customers have realized the importance of understanding what information is being used to drive their sales and marketing objectives. Whether it's store compliance, promotions for multiple channels or field readiness, CIL analytics delivers a powerful answer to the challenge."

Many of InStranet's Global 2000 customers have already implemented CIL, recognizing significant cost savings, as well as better visibility in their channels. For example, an international retail organization with over \$10B in annual revenue, 10,000 products per store and more than 200,000 annual promotions distributed across multiple channels, has deployed CIL, allowing marketing managers to build and syndicate product offers, track promotion effectiveness in the field, and make adjustments at the point-of-sale in real-time. As a result,



same store sales increased over 2 percent, and labor costs were reduced by hundreds of hours per week through associated time savings.

Building on InStranet's history of designing easy-to-deploy and feature-rich applications, CIL 3.2 ships with the following business indicators as part of the new analytics module:

- * Field Audit - enables managers to gather structured feedback about a specific sales or marketing program and launch detailed surveys to poll both field and channel.
- * Awareness Ratio - enables managers to monitor "field readiness" for an initiative. Documents are tracked across many types of business segments including: geography, region, product line and promotion type.

- * Field Readiness Alerts - provides early detection of programs that the field is unprepared to execute. By rectifying these issues and ensuring that field readiness is optimized, managers can maximize the revenue potential of any given program or promotion.

- * Document Effectiveness Metric - provides a dashboard view of what documents are being read and how many times each have been read. Further drilldown provides analysis of document effectiveness and potential areas for process improvement.

- * Two-way Feedback Messaging - enables the end user, whether a channel partner, sales manager or point-of sale, to provide real-time qualitative feedback via the intranet, that is automatically sent back to corporate headquarters.

Some of the benefits InStranet customers have recognized by implementing CIL include:

- * Increased channel and promotion-related revenue
- * Faster and more accurate decision-making
- * Faster navigation of sales and marketing content
- * Better planning and measurement of sales and marketing resources

CIL is a web-based application that ships with InStranet's Content Application Foundation. It includes the following content and document management modules: publishing, workflow, file system agent, syndication, user management, security, metadata tracking and organization, multi-dimensional segmentation engine and application content exchange. CIL

is targeted at companies with multiple distribution channels, large sales organizations, and multiple customer touch points within the following industries: retail, financial, manufacturing, CPG, healthcare and technology. ■

From Explorers to Call Centers: A Visit to Great Falls, Montana, By Jefferson George

When it comes to Montana, most people think of mountains, rivers, buffalo ... almost anything other than business. But 200 years after pioneers Lewis and Clark blazed a trail through the region, the city of Great Falls is pioneering the future of business, thanks to new investment and a major push to attract more industry and better jobs, including call centers.

On March 20-21, in conjunction with the internationally-known C.M. Russell Western Art Auction, an invitation-only tour will showcase the unique business assets that make



Great Falls attractive to expanding companies.

Along with the Art Auction, which honors Western artist Charles Russell and draws buyers from across the U.S. and overseas, journalists will see:

— N.E.W., a call center that opened six years ago with 45 people and now has more than 500 employees, most of whom work on service plans for nationally-known companies Best Buy, Lowe's and DirecTV.

— The new site of a regional call center for First Horizon Home Loans, a subsidiary of First Tennessee National Corp., one of the 50 largest bank holding companies in the U.S. Here's a story with more details:

www.greatfalls Tribune.com/news/stories/20021219/localnews/606602.html.

— FedEx, a new regional hub built two years ago as a model for other hubs. Able to handle four times more traffic than it does now, the FedEx facility at Great Falls International Airport — one of the nation's least-closed

airports — is a major asset for distribution and other companies.

— EnergyWest, a Great Falls-based energy company serving customers from Canada to the Grand Canyon. Great Falls is known as the "Electric City" thanks to an abundance of power generated by the Missouri River.

— Montana State University College of Technology, which has helped train employees for new jobs. With many residents working two or more jobs, the region's "underemployment" situation is attractive for companies that offer full-time jobs with good wages and benefits.

In addition, no visit to Montana is complete without learning about America's most famous explorers at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center on the Missouri River, near the falls that give the city its name. ■

North Texas Tollway Authority Improves Service Levels, Hiring Processes with Call Center Scheduler(tm)

Call Center Scheduler, leading provider of affordable workforce management software for small and medium sized call centers, today announced that the North Texas Tollway Authority has chosen Call Center Scheduler workforce management software as the best solution for addressing its operational changes.

NTTA uses Call Center Scheduler software to predict how changes in hours of operation will affect service levels, staffing and costs. "With Call Center Scheduler we can determine the most effective hiring plan, after appropriately scheduling our staff for maximum efficiency," said Rick Herrington, Director of Information Technology. "Almost immediately, we saw significant service level improvements even without adding employees."

Call Center Scheduler improves forecasting, optimizes schedules and increases overall operational efficiency. Due to the product's early success in the call center, NTTA is applying the capabilities of the Call Center Scheduler software beyond the call center to its retail store employees.

"We are proud to be working with NTTA to create the best workforce management environment," said Wayne Shaw, Call Center Scheduler President. "Early results show this project significantly impacts NTTA's operations by managing workforce costs and improving service levels. We immediately demonstrated improvement from 78% to 92% service level in the call center and expect similar improvement with the retail stores." ■



Concerto Software and Siebel Systems to Launch Joint Go-To-Market Initiative Promoting Pre-Packaged CIM/CRM Solution

Concerto Software, Inc. (NASDAQ: CRTO), a proven provider of customer interaction management (CIM) solutions, today announced that it has joined the Siebel Alliance program as a strategic software partner. Concerto Software and Siebel Systems will jointly market Contact Center FastStart, a packaged contact center solution that includes the Concerto EnsemblePro application, Siebel 7 Call Center, a validated integration and pre-packaged implementation services.

Concerto Software and Siebel Systems will continue selling their respective solutions independently.

The Contact Center FastStart solution enables companies to implement a unified CIM/CRM

(customer relationship management) strategy in significantly less time than it would take to achieve in a traditional call center environment. The integration of EnsemblePro and Siebel eBusiness Applications version 7 has been successfully validated by Siebel Systems for voice interactions. To ensure quick implementation, Concerto Software has designated select professional systems integration firms to deliver pre-packaged deployment services.

With Contact Center FastStart, users can now easily access CRM data while interacting with customers across all channels, enabling them to deliver appropriate service based on customer value. Companies can use real-time customer information, business rules, and agent skill sets when dynamically routing interactions. The combination of Concerto Software's EnsemblePro and Siebel 7 is a more rapidly deployable, cost-effective alternative to the complex, multivendor

installations found in traditional contact centers.

"The combination of Siebel eBusiness Applications and EnsemblePro enables companies to more quickly implement CRM initiatives in a multichannel contact center environment," says Kevin Nix, Group Vice President, Industry Applications, Siebel Systems. "The Contact Center FastStart solution from a market leader like Concerto Software is ideal for companies that want robust functionality, yet require rapid installation, ease of use, and quick return on investment - all critical requirements for selecting the right technology."

Concerto Software's EnsemblePro is a unified contact center solution that has been architected from the ground up to incorporate the functionality required by multimedia contact centers. These include automatic call distribution (ACD); predictive dialing;

interactive voice response (IVR); Web chat and collaboration; and universal queuing, recording, and reporting - while also offering the ability to connect with, and add value to, existing contact center point solutions. Siebel Systems provides organizations with a proven set of industry-specific best practices, CRM applications software, and business processes, enabling corporations to sell to, market to, and serve customers across multiple channels and lines of business.

"Our shared focus on customer satisfaction is the foundation upon which the Concerto Software/Siebel Systems partnership is built. The overarching goal of this strategic alliance is to provide a packaged contact center solution that helps companies improve customer service, increase productivity, and enhance business processes while reducing complexity," says Ralph Breslauer, Executive Vice



President, Sales and Marketing, Concerto Software. "The combination of Concerto Software's unified contact center solution with Siebel Systems' world-class eBusiness applications will enable companies to effectively use what they know about their customers when interacting with them to deliver the best service possible, and therefore build the strongest relationships."

Siebel Systems forms alliances with proven technology leaders to deliver tangible business benefits throughout the enterprise. By choosing Siebel eBusiness Applications and validated partner solutions, Siebel Systems' customers can pursue a best-of-class software acquisition strategy and quickly deploy the very best solution available. The Siebel Validation Program applies rigorous technical scrutiny to evaluate the integration of third-party solutions with Siebel eBusiness Applications. Integrations that meet the rigorous standards of Siebel Systems' testing criteria are

validated and documented by the Siebel Alliance Program. ■

M.E.R. ANNOUNCES THE OPENING OF M.E.R. CAPITAL CORP.

The M.E.R. Group of Companies, a global leader in the CRM industry, has announced the opening of M.E.R. Capital Corp - dedicated to providing the CRM and related industries with a complete portfolio of investment banking services.

M.E.R. Capital Corp. is an investment banking firm providing services to the middle market group for mergers and acquisitions, equity funding, debt financing and leveraged buyouts in North America and throughout the world. Typical deals range from \$10 million to \$200 million. Brad Grubb has joined M.E.R. Capital Corp. as its Vice President.

Bernie Fried, President of M.E.R. Capital Corp. states: "There is an on-going requirement for investment banking services, not only in the call center and related

industries, but in other industries as well. Our goal is to be the financial advisor of choice to all companies who may want to consider a merger, acquisition, LBO, equity infusion or debt financing. Chad McDaniel, President of M.E.R., Inc. and Chairman of M.E.R. Capital Corp. explains: "Our background and experience in the CRM world coupled with our knowledge of the capital markets will make us a valuable asset to many companies in our industry."



ICM to Replace Competitive Predictive Dialer with SER's Call Management System

ICM to Use CPS Exclusively in Their Contact Centers

SER Solutions, Inc., has announced a new contract with International Community Marketing (ICM) in Florida for two new *Call Processing Systems™ (CPS)*.

ICM is a teleservices

company with large telecommunications clients such as AT&T and Verizon.

With *CPS's* powerful predictive dialing capabilities, ICM (www.icmconnect.com) will further enhance its specialized customer contact and Pay for Performance programs. The systems will be an integral component in campaigns designed to sell local and long distance services to potential customers across the country.

"The outstanding performance of *CPS* greatly influenced ICM's decision to completely replace our competitive predictive dialers with SER's system," said Aref Altawam, President, International Community Marketing. "ICM selected *CPS* because it outperformed the competition. We now plan to use this system exclusively throughout our contact centers."

With *CPS*, ICM agents spend more time talking to potential customers rather



than dialing and waiting for a connection. High-speed switching also ensures that an agent hears the customer's first word, facilitating a smooth call introduction and maximizing the customer contact opportunity. *CPS* offers a sophisticated blend of call management functionality and powerful predictive dialing, in addition to a new WebAgent feature that allows browser-based access to the system.

"SER is pleased to expand our partnership with ICM as they continue to add SER's call management solutions to their operations," said Carolyn G. Hyde, Senior Vice President Worldwide Sales and Marketing, SER Solutions, Inc. "Recognized industry wide for its increased efficiency and workhorse predictive dialing, we are confident that the new *CPS* systems will deliver increased productivity for ICM's contact centers." ■

CSI CHOOSES INQUIRA'S ENTERPRISE SELF-SERVICE AND SEARCH SOFTWARE TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE, CORPORATE INTRANET CAPABILITIES FOR COMMUNITY BANKS

InQuira, Inc., a leading provider of customer search and navigation applications for self-service and online marketing, has announced that Computer Services, Inc. (CSI), one of the nation's top five bank data processing companies, has chosen its software to enhance customer service for CSI's nearly 500 community bank customers across the nation. CSI will use the InQuira 5 application in its Customer Resource Centers (CRC) and CSI Web@Work®, a corporate Intranet used internally at CSI and by a growing number of CSI's community bank customers.

Initially, InQuira 5 will be implemented as a key tool for CSI's resource centers, where technology professionals provide immediate support to customers by phone and email. Using InQuira's Natural Language query processing, CRC representatives will use everyday language to access, with the highest degree of accuracy, hard-to-find information from a variety of content sources and knowledge silos. For the first time, CRC representatives will be able to "search" the more than 10,000 pages in CSI's user manuals. The ability to quickly locate information in 36 volumes of CSI products and services documentation will substantially increase productivity while providing faster and more efficient service to customers. In the future, CSI will add InQuira 5 to CSI's secure website for customers, CSI WebSecure®. This will enable customers to search user manuals and other information on their own without contacting the CRC.

CSI will simultaneously deploy InQuira 5 across its internal CSI Web@Work® Corporate Intranet. Web@Work®, which claimed honors for the second consecutive year in the Independent Bankers Association of Texas (IBAT) "2002 Best of Community Banking Awards," is a smaller, secure version of the Internet that creates a central interface to corporate information. It is used both internally by CSI and by Web@Work customers to streamline communications and make corporate information available to employees regardless of where they are located. Integrating InQuira 5's search capabilities into Web@Work will provide enhanced





information access to thousands of pages of information for users across the nation.

“Combining InQuira’s interactive search software with CSI’s existing technologies moves information access into an entirely new realm,” said John A. Williams, chairman of CSI. “Customers contacting the CRC will be served more efficiently, employees company-wide will be able to find information more quickly, and organizations using CSI’s award-winning Web@Work can be confident that their data is only a ‘search’ away. It also underscores CSI’s ongoing commitment to providing the technologies and services our customers need to grow and succeed.”

“InQuira was a good match for CSI’s requirements because of its support for highly accurate Natural Language queries and its industry-specific packaged dictionaries for the banking and financial services industry,” said

Michael Murphy, chief executive officer, InQuira. “As the Customer Resource Center and Web@Work” portal evolve to include InQuira 5, employees will be able to ask questions in their own words and find answers in standard bank data processing and technology support documents, while having access to information across a variety of databases. These new capabilities will have an immediate impact on customer-facing services and support.” ■

eGain Announces New Performance Test Result

eGain Communications Corp. (Nasdaq: EGAN), a leading provider of customer service management software and services to the Global 2000, and Sun Microsystems, Inc. has announced a new performance and scalability test result achieved during a series of tests. eGain Knowledge[tm] running on a Sun Enterprise[tm] 10000 server with 64-way 400 MHz

UltraSPARC[tm] II CPUs and 64 GB memory, in combination with Sun StorEdge[tm] T3 arrays handled 560,456 knowledge sessions and 4,337, 141 server hits for a typical call center day while demonstrating response times of less than 3 seconds with 2,500 users. This is the highest performance demonstrated by a solution for knowledge-guided customer service among publicly available benchmark tests that are based on real-world data. The tests, which were performed at Sun Microsystems’ Benchmark Center in Newark, CA used real-world input and test parameters from a world-class telecom company with over 100 million customers.

The tests demonstrated both horizontal and vertical scalability while maintaining near linear transaction throughput and response times when additional Sun Enterprise 10000 boards were added in a load balanced environment. The tests simulated concurrent agent

sessions on multiple topics accessing information from a large knowledge repository. Additionally, it was able to maintain response times under a continuous variable load by effectively managing resources with no degradation.

The hardware included one Sun Enterprise 10000 server with server domains for the application and one domain for the database. The database domain had three Sun StorEdge T3 arrays (972GB) attached for the data, index, log and application. ■





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