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IMPROVING CUSTOMER LOYALTY THROUGH PROACTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

By Ben Levitan, CEO, EnvoyWorldWide

"Improving customer loyalty" is the ultimate *raison d'etre* of the call center. As economic and regulatory pressures continue to squeeze the enterprise, the need to ensure customer satisfaction has made the art of customer communications a tenuous proposition. Too often, customer service professionals are consumed with efforts to put out the fires of dissatisfaction. Few call centers have embraced the idea of proactive customer care – the ability to reach out to customers before they have a chance to become dissatisfied.

As call centers become more engrained in strategic initiatives, they require innovative thinking and models that leverage proactive customer outreach programs that are cost effective and efficient – mitigating customer service issues before they arise. Customer notification services can be an ideal solution for companies looking to deliver customer welcome calls, payment reminders, new service/upgrade information, and various other personalized and value-added touches.

By proactively making contact at each step in the customer relationship lifecycle, businesses can increase customer loyalty while diffusing potentially frustrating situations and more effectively allocating agent time and resource.

The Interaction Begins

When a customer purchases goods or services, the customer begins an ongoing business relationship with the enterprise. Good businesses recognize that the potential for profitably lies in how it maintains and strengthens the customer relationship over time. Because customers generally place significant value on the quality and speed of interactions, the quicker and easier the enterprise can make interactions for the customer, the more likely they will remain a loyal consumer.

At almost every phase of the customer lifecycle, companies can distinguish themselves from the competition with customer care that anticipates needs and streamlines the delivery of that information, making each interaction quick and resourceful. While many companies understand the need to personalize and streamline interactions, there is still a lag between knowledge of the situation and actual implementation of the practice.

One of the main hurdles in streamlining the process is that most customer-to-business communication is initiated by the customer. Inbound calls to a call center immediately generate a reactionary feeling, as the customer initiates the dialog. Often, these calls are of the routine and repetitive variety, focusing on items such as account balances or shipping times.

The inability to preempt inbound inquiries can have a negative impact on customer satisfaction. The more times a customer has to call to resolve a problem or obtain information, the more likely they are to become frustrated or dissatisfied with the business, jeopardizing the relationship. As many wireless, credit card and ISP companies have learned over the past few years, increased customer frustration leads to churn. Given the enormous economic and competitive pressures most businesses face, combined with the mounting choices consumers have, preventing customer churn has become a mantra readily embraced across all industries.

More companies are seeking solutions that will enable them to effectively communicate with the customer while significantly reducing the

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number of inbound calls a contact center receives. Companies can no longer wait for the customer to initiate the dialogue regarding products and services. To effectively communicate with the customer and diffuse the potential for negative interactions, companies need to alter traditional businesses practices and become more proactive in the customer communication arena.

Getting Proactive – Know Your Audience

The first step in proactive communications is to develop an understanding and knowledge base about the target audience. Customer preferences should be the driver behind all proactive communications campaigns. As demonstrated by the tremendous support and advocacy of the Do Not Call list, consumers do not want to be bothered by outbound calls of limited value. Customers need to be in control of how they are communicated to, deciding when, where, how and how often they are contacted. Proactive customer care means providing the customer with options that let them control the means of communications and can be achieved by letting the customer opt-in to such services.

The purpose of a proactive campaign is not to bombard customers with outbound communications, rather, to provide relevant insightful information that the customer will find valuable, and ultimately, be willing to pick up the phone to hear about.

Getting Proactive – Tailoring Information Delivery

Determining how and when to contact a customer is paramount to the success or failure of a good proactive communications program. Proactive customer programs need to be tailored to fit to individual customer's preferences. Businesses need to personalize the interactions, delivering the relevant information when, where and how the customer wants.

Technology advances have provided customers with a growing choice of communications platforms. Along with traditional modes of communications, like phone and fax, the proliferation of multiple communications devices such as email, wireless, and SMS have created new ways for customers to glean relevant business information. It also provides businesses with the opportunity to further personalize their interactions.

Proactively pushing the information to the customer on their terms lessens inbound call volume for the contact center and deflects the opportunity for frustration to set in, an important step in increasing customer loyalty.

Getting Proactive – Information You Can Use

Generating customer loyalty usually means giving the customer what they want. Proactive customer communications gives the customer control options, varying from how they want to be communicated to, to when they want it; it also means that they have an opportunity to complete transactions rather than just receiving information.

Providing customers with relevant information deflects the potential for inbound calls. Organizations across all industries have the opportunity to provide proactive customer care. For example:

Telecommunications companies can notify customers if they are reaching usage thresholds by offering alterative minutes plans, provide information on account balances and options to pay by credit card or to bridge them to an agent, and welcome new customers and verify plan type and contact information. Financial service organizations can proactively keep borrowers up to date on loan status, and integrate with fraud detection systems to alert customer when suspicious activity occurs. Insurers can speed up the claims settlement process by notifying customers on settlement status, inform them of policy and rate changes; or make them aware of missing paperwork.
Utilities can notify customers of overdue account balances, alert critical care facilities of impending outages and inform customers of rate changes.

A Side Benefit – Reducing Labor Costs and Increasing Service Level

Proactively pushing information, such as account balances and expected product shipment dates, to customers alleviates the flood of routine calls that can often cripple productivity. As a result, call centers will be able to dedicate more time to the critical problem calls, inbound inquiries that need to be attended to due to threat of client loss.

The call center units of the enterprise are undergoing a transformation. While federal regulations such as the Do Not Call list have hampered the marketing practices of the call center, increased competitive pressures have forced the customer care business units to reexamine their businesses practices to reduce customer churn. Enterprises increasingly need to recognize that the path to profitability often lies in maintaining and strengthening the business relationships with customers. Customers place significant value on the quality and speed of interactions. When these standards of measure are not met, customer frustration results, a step in the direction of losing that customer's business.

As businesses in industries such as the credit card and wireless markets continue to see their products and services become commoditized, the mitigating factor in achieving profitably is increasingly becoming customer service. A happy customer is a loyal customer, and a loyal customer tends to be a profitable customer. Proactive communications can go a long way toward "getting to happy."

About the Author
Ben Levitan, president and CEO

Ben Levitan fills the role of president and chief executive officer at EnvoyWorldWide, driving corporate growth and strategy. Prior to joining EnvoyWorldWide, Mr. Levitan was chief operating officer at Viant Corporation (NASDAQ:VIAN), where he led the Internet services firm to unprecedented growth. Previously, Mr. Levitan served as chief executive officer at James Martin & Co. (now Headstrong) and was responsible for leading the company to profitability. He has also served as senior vice president of operations at Cambridge Technology Partners, where Mr. Levitan built the organization's first Internet-focused practice and headed the company's Customer Management and Financial Services Industry practices. He was also instrumental in facilitating merger and acquisition activities. Mr. Levitan currently serves on the board of directors of Primavera Systems, and is a member of the Council on Competitiveness and Young President's Organization. Mr. Levitan was educated at Union College and the London School of Economics. ■

Customer-Driven Knowledge and Proving your Contact Center's Value

By Dr. Jodie Monger and Anne Nickerson

In today's time of constant cost cutting and cutbacks, some contact centers have found the acceptable way to prove their worth to the organization and prevent wrongful cuts that can damage service quality. Center managers are challenged to defend their department as executives and CFOs, many unfamiliar with contact center operations, review plans and budgets. While the usual defense is to arrive with numbers in hand and ways to slice and dice the budget, the best defense is to walk in and say 'this is what **your customers** are saying and here is the Contact Centers' value to the bottom line.'

No matter how much information and numbers the management team has available to them, no one can argue with actual customer feedback. With the Voice of the Customer (VOC) in hand, management can hear what customers are saying – about your company, your service and the individual representatives who assisted them. Customer satisfaction, word of mouth, and loyalty impact the bottom line. Use post-call surveys to get the right information you need to prove your value to the organization. A continuous measurement program allows for an ongoing ROI assessment to occur. But how? It is not as difficult as you might think.

The Best Offense is a Good Defense

The first step is to verify that you are collecting the *right* kind of customer satisfaction data from your customers. This is where most companies lack the understanding or know-how to launch a good offense. Without the right kind of information, the true voice of the customer is not heard and an ROI measurement becomes an invalid, unreliable measurement. If you, as many companies are doing, are only collecting numeric satisfaction scores, you only have part of the story about how the customer feels about their interaction. What you truly need is an effective VOC program that collects scores AND comments. You need the "Why?" part. Be certain that the customer can elaborate on their scoring about the service interaction… in their own voice. It's the *feelings and intent* behind the scores and analysis that are critical to the improvement process.

The second step is to capture the caller satisfaction data at the right time. The best method for an accurate and reliable VOC measurement is through immediate post-call surveys. The evaluations are completed immediately after the interaction with the agent and allow the caller to answer both qualitative and quantitative questions about their interaction. According to scientific research, analysis from evaluations that are delayed has several biases (errors) and is, therefore, not as reliable. Using a delayed evaluation program for a service interaction is based on the caller's recall of the interaction. Anything other than real-time measurement inherently introduces this recall bias (error). Use delayed methods to assess other types of service quality, for example, the follow up process or the correction of billing problems.

One of the key advantages to surveys taken with the "immediately following the interaction" method, is that all the customer information, including qualitative and quantitative feedback, can be directly and accurately linked to the CSR who handled the interaction. Accuracy is possible if you properly review and scrub the data. This powerful tool allows direct access to specific details about the interaction with the customer and pinpoints, better than any other tool, specific behaviors that agents can be trained and coached upon. It is here where the ROI measurement starts to take form.

Customer Intelligence is the Foundation

In the previous articles in the series (http://www.metrics.net/Articles.asp), Metrics and Call Center Coach gave you specific examples of how the comments from the customers can be used to enhance your training and coaching programs. While the articles provide more examples, here is a sample of how you can use the information from customer comments:

"I feel the employee answered the questions, but there were no feelings behind the answers. I asked a question and the answer was just 'no'. I think there could have been a little more feeling or 'I'm sorry, we don't offer that feature.' It was almost like I was speaking with a computer. Thank you."

"Don't rush through the call. Help the customer with whatever they have. Answer the questions fully."

These comments offer an opportunity to go back to the agent directly and coach them on how they are being perceived by the customer. Since representatives take call after call, the work does become monotonous, and sounding like an indifferent machine sneaks into their voice tone, pace and genuine interest in the caller's needs. Sometimes, we have not given representatives the ability to offer alternatives that will satisfy the customer. These types of issues will affect the caller's satisfaction with call.

When agents must enforce corporate policies, satisfaction is also affected:

"My issue isn't with the representative, but with the policy of this company. This can't get handled until next week. That's a very weak policy on behalf of this company. This will affect my future purchase decisions."

"Offer some kind of acknowledgement...Your customer service offered no help. I realize it's your policy, but it wasn't very good."

These comments offer an opportunity to train agents to constructively "read policy" in a way consumers understand and accept as fair to both parties. First and foremost, companies need to frequently review policies to ensure they are fairly serving both the customer and company. Agents need to understand the intent behind policies, rather than use them as a crutch. The customer comments above give us some insight in how to coach agent behaviors. For example, putting a different spin on how information is delivered can make all the difference to customers. Compare these two statements: "Our policy is that you cannot get your payment for at least a month" versus saying to the customer, "I understand you were expecting a different outcome. I am forwarding your request to our specialists who will review your situation. You can expect a follow up call no later than the end of this week." A customer's psychological response to the first will be defensive, whereas the second statement shows the customer that the agent is doing what is within their control to help out.

As the comments show, there are many ways that the customer responses can aid in the training and coaching of your representatives. How does this fit into the big ROI picture? Since this information is directly from the customers, it gives you insight into how to improve your training and coaching programs within the center. The improvement of the service delivery should be directly linked to customer satisfaction scores. As you make changes based on customer insights, track the ROI of your center. You should also track employee satisfaction over time so you have the link for your center to prove what the research shows - with happier agents come happier customers. Agents are happier because compensation and scoring are tied to more meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and more meaningful feedback and development is possible. Customers are happier because they are increasingly getting better service from your center. Outcomes from the voice of the customer measurement program are felt by customers, employees and the company.

The Contact Center is a Strategic Weapon

Stand up and claim the value that is derived from your contact center. Your agents are the relationship manager for your customers and you have the power to protect or destroy that relationship. The financial report for your center is more than "how much is your budget and how many calls do you take for that money?" Do not allow your worth to be looked at strictly from a cost-productivity perspective. Think customer relationship management center. Think protector of the customer base. Think revenue enhancer or producer. Think strategic weapon for your company. Now talk about the value of your center!!

Building the Offense

Focus on developing a Profit and Loss Statement (P&L) and an ROI for your center (and then for each team) that underscores its value to the organization. Take credit for protecting the relationship only at the delighted level; take responsibility for damaging the relationship and prove what the center is returning for the investment made in this required channel.

By using the P&L statement below that was created for a 250 seat contact center, you can easily see the impact the voice of the customer can have on the value of the center and ultimately the company. Using this type of reporting and analysis, you can easily communicate to executive management the value of coaching and training in your center and the impact of greater or poor service delivery.

In conjunction with the P&L, the below formula can be customized to your environment. An ROI should be applied to the center, to each team and even to the individual agent. Use the ROI to prove the value of your coaching and training programs, the value of technology investments, and everything else that is ultimately felt by the customer.

As you can imagine, as you use the VOC program in your center and for the training and coaching programs, the percentage of delighted callers will increase and the percentage dissatisfied callers will decrease. Therefore your ROI will be positively impacted as long as you invest your resources wisely. It is with these numbers that you will be able to armor yourself when management and the CFO come calling. In the end, you will have more satisfied customers, agents, and the voice of the customer will be loud and clear to your management team.

Dr. Jodie Monger is the President of Customer Relationship Metrics, (www.metrics.net) and is a pioneer in customer satisfaction research for the contact center industry. Prior to creating Metrics, she was the founding Associate Director of Purdue University's Center for Customer-Driven Quality. Her expertise is working with organizations to help capture and analyze the voice of their customer.

Anne Nickerson is the Principal and Founder of Call Center Coach, LLC (www.callcentercoach.com), a firm focused on executive coaching, management development, and strategic human resources strategies. Her mission is to facilitate holistic and aligned human resource processes that support bottom line business results. She recently released her new book, ***Not by the Seat of My Pants,*** which is focused on individuals moving from the front-line into supervision and leadership roles.

**For more information or to schedule an interview with Dr. Monger or Anne Nickerson, please contact Jim Rembach at 336-288-8226 or jim.rembach@metrics.net. ■

Putting Clients First
By Dennis Grieco, SVP Richardson

Forget the "Me" generation—it is time for the "You" generation. And in today's competitive sales world, the "You" can only be one person…the Client.

Yet, while many sales organizations claim to put their clients first, the clients themselves would claim otherwise. Why is this so? Is it truly that difficult to stop product dumping and sales pitching? Is it that hard to stop talking and start listening? Or maybe it is simply that salespeople today are being pushed too hard to focus on the number of sales they generate rather than the depth of relationships they build.

Whatever it is, it is time to get back to the client, the one person who really matters. To help get the focus back on the client, let's look at what clients want and need these days. Consider the following 5 key points as your Client's Wish List:

Know Your Business
First and foremost, salespeople need to recognize the importance of knowing their own business. If you are to be credible, if you are to be trustworthy, you must know the full scope of your business and all that means. It includes knowing everything you can about your own organization—it's products and services, it's protocol, it's way of processing things. It is knowing about your industry and all that is going on within that industry, including trends, hot issues, economic impact on customers, regulations, etc. And it is also knowing as much as you can about your competition—who they are and how they are doing—as well as knowing where you have competitive advantages over everyone else and where you are potentially vulnerable. Being able to position yourself effectively against the competition is a must for successful salespeople. Many clients today don't want to have to do the comparisons themselves, which simply means that you have to be prepared to do it for them. Know your business and your clients will respect you.

Know My Business
It isn't enough just to know your own business today—you must also know the client's business. This can mean a number of things, from doing research on the client and/or the client's company before you meet to doing extensive research within and outside of your own organization to get a clearer picture of the client. It means finding out more than just the number of accounts the client has with you (or the balances in those accounts) and finding out what the client is like, what his/her interests are, and then determining the best approach to connecting with that client. The quicker you can customize what you say to the client, the quicker and deeper the connection will be. Of course, this does not include divulging any confidential information you may find out in your research, but it does mean that you can put a strategy in place for how to best build a relationship with this client. Finally, this also means that you should be spending more time asking the client about him/herself rather than talking non-stop about how wonderful you are. Keep in mind that no one is more fascinating to the client than the client. If you are equally fascinated by the client, you will reap different results. Remember that knowing the client's business indicates that you are organized and prepared and that you care enough to avoid "winging it." Know your client's business and your clients will be impressed.

Partner, Don't Pitch
While anyone can do a sales "pitch," not anyone can truly partner with a client. Partnering takes much more than simply knowing your products and services and talking about them ad nauseum. It means much more than reciting your memorized "sales speech" or your marketing script. It means you are more concerned about what the client wants and needs and more concerned about building a trusting relationship than forcing the client to "buy things" from you. Poor salespeople talk about "partnering." Great salespeople do it. Clients today need to trust you, respect you, and yes, even like you, if they are to do business with you. They have too many choices and too many options to settle for less. They are also more concerned today with making the wrong buying decision. How you approach your clients will tell them everything they need to know about your motives. Are you

out to make your numbers or are you more interested in truly fulfilling client needs? Clients can tell the difference and it will impact their decisions. Consider this: while most clients today do not want to be "sold to" or "sold at," they do "want to buy." Selling to or at someone is simply painful for all involved and it focuses more on the product and the sale than on the client. Clients, however, like to buy—so smart salespeople today are more focused on helping the client make a meaningful, informed, educated buying decision than they are on making the sale. Ironically, if you help them buy, the sale will come naturally and painlessly. Partners help clients make important buying decisions; Pitch-people dump information and hope for the best.

Add Value

Everyone talks about adding value. What they mostly forget about is how to do it effectively. Basically, they need to recognize that the only person who determines what is value-added is the client. Not they themselves, not their management, not their marketing departments. Only the client can make this determination and the best way for salespeople today to understand the client's viewpoint on this is to ask great questions and then listen to the answers. If you listen with your ears and your eyes, clients will tell you what they want and what is important to them. And if you are having trouble reading a client, ask about their priorities, what is important to them, and what they are looking for that will make the experience and the relationship worth their time and effort. Adding value cannot simply be a phrase that you hope the client believes, it has to be an attitude and an approach that meets and/or exceeds their expectations. Add value from the client's perspective and you will always be one step ahead of the competition.

Don't Waste My Time!

This last point on the client's wish list is a significant one. Think of it this way—if you, as a salesperson, do not have any time to waste of your own, why would you think a client does? More than anything, clients consider their time precious and valuable and anyone who wastes even two minutes of it will suffer the consequences. Remember that no one is more important to the client than the client him/herself and if you waste their time you are showing a lack of consideration for that client as a human being. If you insist on talking about things that the client does not care about or has no interest in, not only will the client tune you out, they are more likely to make a buying decision to go with someone else! Be respectful of a client's time and they will be respectful of yours. There is no better time management tool in the world.

When you take these five points into consideration, you are putting the client first. Regardless of where you are in the sales cycle, these “wish list” items will keep you on the straight and narrow and will continuously tell the client that building a relationship with them is far more important than meeting your numbers. The best part of all is recognizing that, with the right approach and a solid client focus, you can do both.
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Spanish language proficiency tests: Assessing the capabilities of bilingual job candidates

by Astrid Rial, President
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Importance of fully bilingual employees

Every day we read or hear about how companies are targeting and capturing US Hispanic customers. Currently more than one person in seven in the US is of Hispanic origin and this group makes up the largest minority group in the United States, over 41 million people! In 2003, Cheskin Research conducted a survey of 6,000 US Hispanics and found that 76% prefer to be marketed to in Spanish. These consumers reasonably expect that if they read or hear an advertisement in Spanish or receive a solicitation in Spanish, they can respond to the company by telephone or in-person and speak to a Spanish-speaking representative. A qualified and appropriately trained bilingual team can lead to more sales and satisfied customers.

Hiring fully bilingual employees can be more challenging than it appears since Spanish speakers in the US may be immigrants, or first, second or third generation Americans, for example. Some Spanish-speakers speak Spanish as their first language while others' first language is English. Some Spanish-speakers were educated in English, but speak Spanish with their families and in their communities or vice versa. Therefore the business dilemma for hiring managers is that they may not be able to distinguish between a casual and a business Spanish-speaker simply by conducting an interview in English and reading the applicant's resume.

How do companies ensure they are actually hiring qualified bilingual candidates who can communicate professionally in English and Spanish? Recruiting and hiring managers at companies pursuing “Best Practice” US Hispanic customer care utilize language proficiency assessments to test verbal communication, writing and/or translations skills to objectively evaluate the competency of job applicants at the time of the interview.

Spanish-speakers in the US

US Hispanics come from more than twenty different countries and use the Spanish language differently. In addition there are distinct geographic and regional differences of how Spanish is spoken in the US. Just as in the English language, there are diverse dialects, accents and word usage.

A challenging issue for companies servicing US Hispanic customers is communicating in neutral, professional “Business Spanish” to all of its customers. Employees and customers may come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and, therefore, communicate differently both in written and spoken Spanish. To be an effective communicator, companies must become aware of the regional differences in how Spanish is used to effectively service Spanish-speaking customers.

Many people who were born in the US learned to speak Spanish at home and are unable to read or write fluently in Spanish. Their understanding of the Spanish language may be limited. The challenge this provides in the workplace is that conversations at home are colloquial. Speaking to family and friends about sports, television shows, meals, etc., is very different from conducting a telephone conversation with a customer to cross sell a product or service, describe how to make a payment using a check-by-phone service, explain the terms and conditions of a contract or solve a billing dispute.

Challenges bilingual employees face

Many companies are located in areas where there is a short supply of Spanish-speaking job candidates. But even if applicants are abundant, Human Resources managers understand they must determine the proficiency level of Spanish and/or English language skills prior to making a hiring decision. Language assessments that test verbal communication, writing skills and/or translation skills evaluate the proficiency and competency of the Spanish-speaker's ability to communicate.

If your company is servicing multilingual customers, then they expect equally excellent service in whatever language they speak. For those servicing US Hispanic customers, only the largest or most specialized companies are able to staff entire departments or call centers to handle calls in only one language. Most bilingual call center customer service, telemarketing and collection agents in the US handle both English and Spanish calls randomly throughout the day so that companies can meet service level goals, schedule enough agents during peak times and optimize the use of inbound and outbound call center technology. Therefore, these call center agents must be able to competently communicate in both Spanish and English and be proficient in the specialized vocabulary of your industry.

Challenges hiring managers face

Many recruiters and Human Resources personnel do not speak Spanish or do not speak proficiently enough to be able to assess a candidate's capabilities; therefore many interviews for bilingual positions are conducted in English only. Without a language proficiency test these managers must base their hiring decisions on trust that the candidate actually speaks Spanish competently and can conduct a professional business conversation in Spanish.

For example, our firm recently assessed the verbal and written skills of a Supervisory candidate. The candidate had previously worked as a translator for a state government office, therefore, it would seem that his Spanish language skills would be proficient. In fact, although the candidate was able to clearly communicate verbally, he failed the written test because he did not use correct grammar or vocabulary to translate a simple paragraph. The English-speaking hiring manager had no idea of this candidate's deficiencies since he did not speak Spanish. Unfortunately, this is not an unusual situation encountered by companies in the US every day.

Language Proficiency Assessments

The objective of the language proficiency testing process is to assist recruiters and hiring managers in screening and selecting bilingual applicants and to identify additional language training or coaching support that may be needed for the candidate.

The most efficient Spanish language verbal skills communication assessments are handled by conducting a ten to fifteen minute Spanish language telephone conversation of the job candidate at the time of the interview. To objectively assess candidates, assessment professionals use a pre-written survey or questionnaire of open-ended questions in Spanish. Questions that are business oriented and customized for the position will provide the best indication of how a candidate will perform on the job, i.e. call center representative candidates may be asked questions about handling telephone calls while branch personnel may be asked about experiences with face-to-face communication. If the position requires prior experience, then the assessment professional conducting the telephone interview may ask more specific, technical questions about the company and/or industry in Spanish. These kinds of assessments are particularly useful for fields such as consumer credit, insurance, mortgage loans, banking, healthcare, etc.

The candidate is then evaluated based on his verbal communication skills, use of proper grammar rules, correct verb conjugation, utilization of a wide variety of vocabulary, whether or not slang, made-up words or English words are inserted into the Spanish conversation and other objective criteria. The hiring manager receives immediate verbal feedback and a written evaluation report immediately after the telephone interview that scores the language skills of the candidate in specific categories. This information can be used to make or decline a job offer.

Writing skills assessments require the applicant to translate a simple paragraph or answer an open-ended essay question of a general or specific topic related to your company or industry. The candidate must be able to demonstrate he can write grammatically correct sentences, using correct spelling, utilizing a variety of vocabulary and communicate ideas in an understandable manner.

Translation skills assessments require the candidate to have a higher-level understanding of both English and Spanish than a writing test alone. Translation skills tests that require translations from Spanish to English, English to Spanish and corrections of an poorly written piece will best evaluate a translator's abilities. Depending on the skills required for the position, translation pieces may be of general topics, specific to an industry or technical in nature.

Because many bilingual employees are required to provide services to both Spanish and English speaking customers, assessing the language skills of bilingual job candidates in both languages helps evaluate whether the candidate is truly qualified for a bilingual position. This eliminates bias if this practice is put into place for all bilingual job candidates. Assessment reports provide employers with objective information necessary to decide which position the candidate is most suited for and to qualify individuals for a bilingual pay differential.

Assessment results are the most objective and least susceptible to fraud when the candidate completes the test from the company's offices instead of calling from home or another location.

Providers who do not require an advance appointment are the most flexible for recruiters and hiring managers since no planning is required and any eligible candidate may be assessed at the time of the interview. Some assessment services provide staffing for job fairs and weekend and evening appointments as well as during regular office hours.

Conclusion

Companies who pay a bilingual pay differential emphasize the importance of conducting interviews in Spanish and testing both the Spanish and the English language proficiency of the job candidates to ensure their verbal communication and/or writing skills are professional and appropriate for a business environment. Currently the amount companies pay for a bilingual pay differential to call center representatives ranges from about $.50 to $1.00 per hour.

Many companies conduct personality tests, clerical and computation skills assessments and drug and alcohol checks to screen job applicants. These employers know that the benefits of pre-employment testing are better quality employees, reduced turnover, money saved and they help weed out unqualified applicants. Now companies who service Spanish-speaking customers have an additional resource available: language proficiency assessments to objectively test the verbal communication and writing skills of bilingual job candidates.

For more information about the language assessment services of Arial International please call 888-446-2331, send an e-mail to astrid@arialinternational.com or visit us on-line at www.arialinternational.com.

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NEWS

Genesys Announces IP-Enabled Genesys Voice Platform

for the Enterprise Market

SAN FRANCISCO – Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Inc., an Alcatel company (NYSE: ALA, Paris: CGEP), announced an IP-enabled version of the Genesys Voice Platform (GVP) to serve enterprise customers of all sizes. The new offering is available now. The introduction of the new IP-enabled enterprise edition of GVP supports Genesys' strategy to expand Internet Protocol (IP) capabilities throughout the Genesys Voice Platform product portfolio.

Enterprises actively considering migrating to IP can do so without an extensive system overhaul because the new IP-enabled version of GVP allows for time-division multiplexing (TDM) and IP to coexist within the same environment. Existing TDM-based environments limit the return on investment (ROI) on contact center software due to the inherent complexities and high cost of ownership at the infrastructure level. By adopting an *Open IP* approach being driven by Genesys, enterprise customers can maximize ROI on GVP, while enhancing the customer experience and increasing customer retention.

"Enterprise customers that are actively moving forward with IP initiatives will find value in the self-service and ROI deliverables of the IP-enabled Genesys Voice Platform," said Elliot Danziger, chief technology officer, Genesys. "With this new offering, Genesys presents flexible IP migration solutions to enterprises of all sizes."

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IEX Receives *Customer Interaction Solutions®* Magazine's 2005 CRM Excellence Award

TotalView® Workforce Management System Singled Out for Helping Clients Improve CRM

RICHARDSON, TEXAS: IEX Corporation, a Tekelec company (Nasdaq: TKLC), announced *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine has named its TotalView® Workforce Management system as a recipient of the 2005 CRM Excellence Award.

###

Syntora Signs Agreement with Matrium Technologies to Offer Real-time

Analytics and eLearning Solutions to the Australian Call Center Market

Toronto, Canada—Syntora, Inc. announced an agreement has been signed with Matrium Technologies Pty Ltd, a leading provider of contact center solutions, to distribute the company's Agentivity Analytics and eLearning solutions. Under the terms of the agreement, Matrium Technologies will provide full local support for Agentivity in Australia.

The Australian contact center industry is experiencing continued growth. Increased competition among companies for skilled customer service agents has pushed salaries higher and placed a greater focus on operational costs. Syntora's Agentivity helps improve agent performance through its Analytics and eLearning modules offering reduced operating costs year to year.

"The distribution agreement with Matrium Technologies allows Syntora to take advantage of the growing international market for analytics and eLearning solutions," said Henry Lach, President and CEO of Syntora Inc. "We are excited about the opportunity to partner with Matrium and to bring Agentivity to the Australian Call Center Market."

"Matrium Technologies is the leading supplier of the workforce management solution IEX TotalView," said Anthony Pisani, General Manager for Matrium Technologies. "We are expanding our presence in the Australian contact center market by offering further Workforce Optimisation suite of products to the Australian Market. Syntora's Agentivity Analytics and eLearning solution allows us to go beyond traditional workforce management, to provide real-time analytics and eLearning to call centers. This agreement will serve to strengthen our presence and leverage upon our strong reputation in providing workforce management solutions."

###

Envox Worldwide Introduces Envox CT ADE 8.4

Commitment to "best-in-class" IVR development tool reinforced as VoIP support is expanded

WESTBOROUGH, MA – Envox Worldwide, a leading global provider of voice solutions, announced the availability of Envox CT ADE™ version 8.4, the company's first formal CT ADE product release since it acquired the product line from Intel in March, 2005. One of the most widely used interactive voice response (IVR) development tools in the industry, Envox CT ADE is a collection of utilities that *enables developers to create and deploy IVR applications more quickly and easily than using the Intel® Dialogic® telephony APIs.*

###

Symon, Releases Digital Appliance for Video Networks

DALLAS - Symon Communications, Inc., a leading global provider of employee and corporate communications and enterprise performance, workforce and productivity management solutions, announces the general availability of its Symon Digital Appliance™ (SDA-500). The SDA series of advanced network-manageable products delivers digital signage and a wide variety of broadcast content to visual displays such as televisions and plasmas, while combining Symon's expertise in real-time data collection and visual display technology.

"'We continue to introduce business solutions serving enterprises 'from the break room to the board room™' that are easy to use, are more integrated and have a lower total cost of ownership for Symon customers," said Charles Ansley, Symon Communications president and CEO. "We are extremely proud of our newest product line in our broad portfolio, the SDA-500 broadcast appliance. minating the need for multiple third party hardware and software products to display professional broadcast content."

###

North Carolina Vacation Home Realty Firm

Chooses inContact to Manage Inbound Toll Free Calls

Salt Lake City, UT – UCN, Inc. (OTCBB:UCNN), a provider of on-demand contact handling software and business telecommunication services delivered over the UCN national VoIP network, today that Seaside Vacations of North Carolina has implemented the UCN inContact call handling suite of applications to unify its four business offices under one common call handling system.

Seaside Vacations, founded in 1990 and headquartered in Kitty Hawk, NC, operates four realty offices in North Carolina, managing over 324 mid-range to luxury vacation homes in the Outer Banks area. Prior to implementing the UCN solution, Seaside outsourced the handling of its 25 inbound toll free numbers to a call center service. Gordon Jones, President, Seaside Realty, had been investigating various VoIP solutions with the goal of taking that function inhouse during office hours to better manage the customer contact experience and his call handling costs.

"With the UCN inContact solution," said Jones, "we were able to supplement our existing Nortel PBX with inContact ACD (automated call distribution) capabilities, manage our on-hold calls in the network, and route inbound calls to specific functional groups." Seaside designed their system so that 25 toll free numbers get routed to specific skill groups, such as new reservations, existing reservations or property owner services. "The inefficiencies of our old PBX and hunt group technology kept us from effectively handling our call volume and prevented us from sending calls to at-home workers. Today we have a much lower abandonment rate, shorter hold times, and quicker response times because calls are routed to the next available individual within that skills group, no matter where that person is located – at- home or at one of our four offices."

Message Technologies, Inc. Joins Microsoft Speech Partner Program, Expands with SALT Hosting Environment

ATLANTA – Message Technologies, Inc. (MTI), an industry-leading provider of speech IVR hosting, services, and solutions, announced that it has joined the Microsoft Speech Server Program as a Voice User Interface Designer (VUI), Application Developer and Hoster. As a result of joining the Speech Server Program, MTI will offer application hosting on Microsoft Speech Server (MSS) 2004 R2, which is based on the open industry standard Speech Application Language Tags (SALT). The adoption of MSS and SALT by hosters such as MTI will encourage the growth of speech recognition solutions, thus broadening industry-wide options for speech application developers.

This strategic partnership merges the functionality of the SALT hosting environment with MTI's extensive hosting infrastructure, which features best-of-breed platforms, redundancy and load balancing, virtually eliminating call failures. The combined technology of MTI's application design, development, and hosting services and the SALT hosting environment will allow MTI to offer its customers uniquely packaged and cost-effective solutions. By adding support for MSS, MTI will be able to offer a more consolidated hosting solution to developers. In addition, the MSS distinctive pricing model allows greater flexibility to smaller developers, as prices are based per processor, not per telephony port.

By offering the SALT hosting environment in conjunction with industry standard VoiceXML hosting platforms, MTI will make available to customers a range of hosting options not offered through other industry-wide hosters.

"MTI is committed to providing the most flexible hosted speech application environment to our customers," said MTI President Darrell Knight. "Adding Microsoft Speech Server to our infrastructure gives us the ability to deliver the broadest range of price and solution variants on the market today."

###

CollabGen has announced the upcoming release of a series of generic Technology White Papers. Each part in the series will categorize a major component or set of components as an integral part of an overall telecommunications architecture (infrastructure, systems and applications) and will cover the major trends including networks convergence, TDM / IP Telephony, portals, presence / proximity, multi-modal and collaborative communications.

If you are interested in posting or distributing these White Papers, please contact Ed LaBanca at 877-726-2522

###

Merced Systems Joins Genesys InterWorks Partner Program

Redwood City, California - Merced Systems, a leading provider of contact center performance management systems announced the company has joined the Genesys InterWorks Partner Program. Through the InterWorks Partner Program, Merced Systems will develop tightly integrated analytical applications with Genesys' products and make them available to Genesys customers.

The Genesys InterWorks Program is designed to facilitate technology integrations with Genesys products. Customers today demand comprehensive integrated solutions that minimize risk, reduce costs, and provide a fast return on investment. Joint customers will benefit from the relationship between Merced Systems and Genesys through simplified deployments reducing the cost, resources, and time needed to implement a joint solution.

Through the Merced Performance Suite, joint customers will have access to contact center interaction data from Genesys products such as Genesys Info Mart, making it easier to measure and manage operational performance. By deploying the integrated solution, customers will have access to:

Highly personalized dashboards and reports Analytics to perform root cause analysis Integrated workflow linking data with action to drive employee behavior change

"We're pleased to be working with Genesys to deliver a highly integrated Performance Management application to their customer base," said Mark Selcow, President of Merced Systems. "We look forward to providing Genesys customers easy access to the critical operational insight they need to make better, fact-based decisions at every level of the operation."

###

Syracuse University to Implement SER CPS Enterprise Edition for Targeted Fund Raising Campaigns Across its Thirteen Schools and Colleges

Dulles, Virginia – SER Solutions, Inc., a provider of innovative software solutions that help contact center operators achieve unprecedented efficiencies, maximize workplace productivity, and enhance customer service, announced that Syracuse University will implement CPS Enterprise Edition (CPS E$^{2\text{TM}}$) to manage its targeted fund raising campaigns across its schools and colleges.

A prestigious, private research university founded in 1870, Syracuse University is best known for its S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Leveraging CPS Enterprise Edition's flexible list management capabilities across all thirteen of its schools and colleges, Syracuse University will be able to easily segment its alumni and parent lists by donor type and provide concise and specific fund raising campaign information tailored to meet the specific needs of its colleges and schools. Additionally, CPS Enterprise Edition's powerful outbound dialing capabilities will help to minimize the amount of calls made to each donor and improve overall call quality.

"Syracuse University has been using SER's outbound predictive dialers for the past ten years. When it came time to evaluate the next-generation of call management solutions, it was apparent to us that CPS Enterprise Edition was clearly the best solution available in the marketplace, " said Brad Sobotka, Information Manager of Annual Giving, Syracuse University.

###

Amcat Contact Center Suite wins CRM Excellence Award

Amcat's Contact Center Suite was awarded the CRM Excellence award from Customer Interaction Solutions magazine in their July 2005 issue. The award features how Amcat's inbound & outbound unified contact management system has enabled a growing online mobile phone e-tailer, e2Save, to take a proactive stance to reduce customer churn. Using the Amcat contact management system, e2Save contacts its large UK-based mobile phone customers at precise intervals. Each contact is scheduled to reflect a customer care issue scheduled for the optimum time in the relationship. These contacts include: satisfaction checks, upgrades, plan changes, etc. Through its inbound and outbound contact strategy, e2Save has reduced customer churn, one of the biggest issues in the mobile phone industry.

###

CallMiner Adds Web-Based Reporting and Analysis Capability to its Speech Analytics Suite

FORT MYERS, FL. – CallMiner Inc., a leading developer of speech analytics software for the enterprise announced the immediate availability of CallMiner Reportal, a web-based reporting and analysis tool enabling the creation of ad-hoc and automated reports from within TrendMinertm and Tireless Supervisortm. The CallMiner Reportal acts as a common interface and hub within the CallMiner Analytics Suite that publishes results generated from TrendMiner and Tireless Supervisor. The Reportal is the first application of its type that enables managers and executives in an organization to easily format speech analytics results into actionable information.

The CallMiner Reportal organizes and delivers results customized to the end-users requirements. The Reportal is tightly integrated with CallMiner's Analytics Suite making information contained within calls available immediately. Using Reportal, end-users can easily construct analyses based on ad-hoc inquiries or use the tool to format an automated report.

"CallMiner Reportal provides a unified interface into CallMiner's Suite of applications," said Jeff Gallino, CEO of Callminer. "The Reportal enables users to create automated and ad-hoc reports that extract intelligence from any size audio archive. The application provides critical customer and agent information that CRM systems could not analyze."

###

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Tyrant Turnaround: Going from Difficult to Delighted Callers

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***

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(A Call Center Times' guide to providers of call center products and services)

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