



20<sup>th</sup> December 2003

## Contact Centre World - Industry Execs Share Their Views

### **What has been the greatest challenge the contact center industry has faced in the last 12 months and why?**

Competition, from offshore, from web-based businesses and from other contact centres operating in the same sector.

Within the UK the "honeymoon" period for contact centres has come to an end. Contact centres, (or call centres as was), were originally justified as a means to provide new "direct" businesses to compete with the likes of First Direct, and Direct Line, providing extra customer choice and convenience. The next wave of expansion came as companies realised that the cost base for running a direct business was much lower than that of a branch based operation. It wasn't long before major institutions were competing to open 1000 seat contact centres before their competitors. Subsequently, the CRM bandwagon started rolling, stimulating further waves of investment.

Now that contact centres are widespread, the opportunities for further savings to be made by closing down branches are limited, and the benefits promised by the CRM revolution have failed to fully materialise. Therefore contact centres are faced with finding ways of delivering greater efficiency, supporting increased volumes of transactions, or delivering more revenue generation, without increasing costs.

### **In 2004 what do you think will be the top priorities for (answer both):**

*a) Contact center managers*  
Delivering improvements in efficiency, or increasing call-handling capacity whilst maintaining business as usual. This will have to be achieved without increasing staff attrition rates, and in most cases without major investment programmes. Equally, high quality management information will be

required to assist in managing these processes and validating progress.

### *b) Company executives*

Responding to demands to become more competitive, whilst resisting the temptation simply to outsource offshore. The headline savings for going offshore are very attractive – and it is right for some organisations. However it is very important to account for all costs, operational factors and customer attitudes to going offshore. For many companies there will be better ways of delivering the improvements required.

### **What do you believe (a technology, process, attitude etc) will have the biggest impact on the industry over the next 12 months - how and why?**

*On the basis of discussions with existing customers and other enquiries we are receiving there are three significant impact areas:*

The provision of automated, self-service options for customers, using well-designed IVR, providing either touch-tone or speech-recognition based user interfaces. If these applications are carefully designed to provide both the correct customer experience, and the types of transactions customers demand, they can deliver massive cost savings. Consider that IVR platforms have fallen dramatically in price, and can process both routine and complex transactions non-stop 24x7x365, leaving agents free to handle more challenging, higher value transactions, and the scale of the savings become apparent.

The second area of interest is from organisations consolidating existing multi-site contact centre networks, or linking them to assist in load balancing, and deliver efficiencies. This throws up a whole host of challenges, including process harmonisation, call routing and linking MI systems to assist in effective management of the consolidated operation

We are also receiving an increasing number of enquiries from customers who wish to use management information to manage contact centre operations more pro-actively. Typically this is driven by organisations linking different contact centres together to assist in load balancing. In other cases MI drawn from a number of disparate sources must be combined to provide reports that address real business objectives. This often involves combining information from telephony systems, core operational systems and contact management systems to provide an overall picture. We are now seeing organisations identifying a need for bespoke systems to meet their unique requirements for MI. This isn't the most glamorous part of contact centre operations, but well executed MI database and reporting systems can make a massive difference to an organisation's ability to run a competitive business.

### **What impact has 'external' events (economy, continuing terrorist fears, etc) had on your company, and how have you adapted your business, if at all?**

We have seen a reduction in major capital projects, and many of our customers are now working closely with us to see how they can squeeze more out of the existing operation, without embarking on costly technology implementations

### **Do you feel the service you personally get as a consumer is better or worse than it was a year ago and why do you think it's so?**

I generally feel things have deteriorated somewhat – this is probably a reflection of operations inappropriately moving offshore, the problems associated with the breaking up of the directory enquiries market, and poorly planned consolidation exercises.

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