

“The Revolution in Call Centers”

Presented by Bob Choate, AT&T Solutions

We live in exciting times! The explosive growth of the Internet and intelligent networks is allowing--in fact, forcing—businesses to evolve from conducting face-to-face interactions with customers to interacting through an increasing variety of electronic touchpoints.

At the same time, customers are becoming more demanding, both in the type and the quality of the contacts they experience. They want interactions that are real-time, complete, comprehensive, persistent, and ‘my’ way. Some have even come to prefer using self-service options to having personal contact with a human being.

The very definition of a ‘customer’ is changing too, encompassing not only the people and organizations that buy products and services, but also employees, suppliers and partners, in short, everyone who has a stake in a company’s success. Often it’s difficult to tell which ‘role’ an individual is playing at a given moment. All this is happening at a time when economic pressures are causing increased emphasis on controlling costs and limiting investments.

And then, there is the technology. The “virtual workplace” is a reality. In certain realms, work is no longer a place; it is a state of mind. Networking technology is allowing us to extend the traditional office out into the rest of the world, and even into a worker’s home. In the year 2000, approximately 56 percent of AT&T’s workforce worked from home at least once a month, up from just 13 percent in 1990.

The convergence of voice and data networks will impact not only costs, but capabilities as well. The increasing availability of integrated Customer Relationship Management solutions is providing businesses with better, more sophisticated solutions. Perhaps the greatest potential for impacting how companies interact with customers will come from automated response, advanced speech recognition and natural language technologies.

What does all this mean, and how does it impact call centers? To support these changes, call centers must evolve and change. What will the contact center of the future look like? Will we even be able to recognize it as a call center?

Certainly call centers must shift from primarily handling voice contacts with customers, into contact centers that support a multitude of electronic touchpoints (Web, voice response, voice recognition, e-mail, and FAX) across a broad spectrum of organizations and people. Will the physical call center that housed those agents also evolve into a virtual contact center, where agents can be anywhere, including in their own homes?

This presentation examines the effects of these technological and societal changes and provides an overview of what the virtual contact center of the future could look like. It also provides an overview of the work done by AT&T Labs to examine what can, and is, being accomplished by applying the capabilities of intelligent networks to meet the ever-increasing demands placed on technology by these virtual contact centers.

**For more information or a copy of this presentation, please contact:
Bob Choate – AT&T Solutions
rwchoate@att.com**