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National Association of Call Centers

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The fun, informative and unique  
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call center industry

Volume 10, Issue 8 - August 12, 2015

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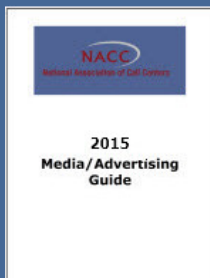
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### Quote

"Isn't it cool when the days that are supposed to feel good, actually do?"

~ Jim Carrey

### Reports from the NACC

The NACC has been burning the midnight oil and trying until our fingers are sore to bring

## In This Issue . . .

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### Meet The Members: Mike Chew, Mississippi Industries For The Blind

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, [Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org](mailto:Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org)



This month we're chatting with Mike Chew, Executive Director of Mississippi Industries for the Blind. Mike is a volunteer NACC member and active in our community. His is a contact center, like his job, is unlike any other we've come across in the NACC and we're pleased to bring his story to you. If you'd like to contact Mike after you've read his story, he can be reached at 601-984-3204 or via e-mail at [mchew@msblind.org](mailto:mchew@msblind.org).

**NACC:** Let's start by learning a little more about Mississippi Industries for the Blind. Will you tell us a little more about the organization and its contact center?

**MC:** Mississippi Industries for the Blind is a Mississippi State agency that is self-funded. We were established in 1942. For most of that time we have provided jobs in manufacturing. In the last 5-10 years, technology for persons who are blind has advanced to the point that it is now possible for a blind person to be a call center agent. As we looked at the population of people that we serve, people who are at least legally blind, we found that many wanted jobs other than in manufacturing. Other organizations across the country were providing successful employment in the call center industry and the area looked to be one with potential. So, in 2011 MIB put into place the infrastructure for a call center.

**NACC:** How did you come to be involved with Mississippi Industries for the Blind?

**MC:** I was able to meet a particular need that they had. My background is in engineering and manufacturing and at the time, MIB needed a manufacturing manager. I lost my vision in the late 1990s and was looking for another career opportunity. I joined MIB in 2001 and became the Executive Director in 2007.

**NACC:** Tell us a little more about your customer service and career background.

**MC:** Most of my career background is in manufacturing, particularly in plastics and chemicals. During much of my career, however, I managed the quality programs for the organizations I worked for. One part of that job included managing customer complaints. When a complaint was received, I would undertake the investigation, try to identify the causes underlying the complaint and work with production to implement corrective actions. Throughout the quality management process I would be talking with the customer, keeping them updated on the investigation of the problem and what was being done to correct it. Part of this process would also include arranging for product returns or replacements to ensure customer satisfaction. As it turned out, this was customer service experience and I didn't even realize it at the time!

**NACC:** How does Mississippi Industries for the Blind recruit and select your contact center agents? Do you look for any specific talents or attributes?

**MC:** First of all, we look for individuals who have computer skills and experience. We look in particular for individuals that are familiar with adaptive software that might be necessary. There are two primary types of adaptive software – a screen magnifier and a screen reader. A screen magnifier does just what you would expect; it magnifies what's on the screen. This would be used by individuals who still have some vision but need some extra help.

The other type of adaptive software is called a screen reader. This software reads the text on the screen for those of us who are totally blind. This works well for many programs such as spreadsheets, word processors, and e-mail. Many customized programs may or may not be suited for a screen reader and we evaluate this on a case by case basis.

and typing until our fingers are sore to bring out reports to our members. Each is listed below. If you are interested to see what we are writing about, click on the links below and download the executive summary of each. If you like what you see, join the NACC so that you can view these reports and others that will be coming out soon on our website. These reports will ensure that you know the latest trends in the industry.

[HireIQ Candidate Optimizer Disrupts The Status Quo, Powers Revolution In Customer Service Human Capital Management: May 2015](#)

[Verint Jumps Into The Gamification Game: April 2015](#)

[Research Update - Strong 4th Quarter Tops Year of Growth for the 2014 U.S. Contact Center Industry Employment](#)

[Geo-Fencing: Expanding The Contact Center Boundaries?: November 2014](#)

[Neural Phonetic Speech Analytics: The Brains behind Nexidia Interactions Analytics 11.0: July 2014](#)

[Nexidia Pushes Speech Analytics Envelope with Nexidia Interaction Analytics 11.0: July 2014](#)

[The Time is Now: Workforce Optimization Becomes Reality for the](#)

[Small-to-Medium-Sized Contact Center: July 2013](#)

[Finding the Silver Lining in the Contact Center Cloud: May 2013](#)

[The At-Home Agent Movement - A Benchmark Quantitative Analysis: January 2013](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2012 Data](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2012 Data](#)

[Contact Center Mobility Study: May 2012](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2011 Data](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2011 Data](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2011 Data](#)

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[North American Contact Center Industry 2008-2009: The Year in Review and a Look Ahead](#)

[State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2008 Data](#)

[60 Ideas in 60 Minutes: 2008 Session](#)

[60 Ideas in 60 Minutes: 2007 Session](#)

Then we look for typing skills and other technical skills.

If a person meets all these requirements we will do some internal phone testing to see how well they do on the phone. If they meet all of these requirements we will do more training specific to customer service and the particular campaign we are hired for. With the exception of the accessibility software skills, we are probably doing the same as most other call centers do.

As far as recruiting goes, we work with the local Department of Rehabilitation to find our agents, and word of mouth works well too. People who are blind have a good communication network and the word of possible employment spreads fast. There is a simple reason for how well word-of-mouth works. 70 percent of people who are blind are unemployed so there is a real need for the employment and career opportunities we provide.

**NACC:** Talk about the rewards of working each day with your unique workforce.

**MC:** The real reward is making a difference in people's lives, and we do this every day. Our people just want the opportunity to work and they truly appreciate a job when they get one. Because of this work ethic we have a very low turnover rate. It is great to see someone who has been on disability their entire life start to earn a living so they can purchase a house, send their kids to college, develop a career, and look forward to retirement because they've earned it.

**NACC:** Given the fact that turnover is such a common industry-wide problem, to what do you attribute your low turnover rate?

**MC:** Let me reiterate that there is today a large population of blind people out there who are looking for work, and they tend to make very hard-working and loyal employees. If turnover is an issue in any contact center, I recommend they investigate hiring some of hard-working people from the blind community. Granted, there will be some hurdles to overcome that you won't face with your sighted workforce, like transportation and accessibility, but once these hurdles are overcome you will have a stable, reliable, long-term employee. You'll come out ahead in the long run.

**NACC:** Of course, I have to also ask about the challenges of working each day with your unique workforce.

**MC:** We have a saying here at MIB: "This is a place where blindness is not a disability." We face challenges every day, just like any other place of employment. Some of these challenges are due to blindness, but they just seem normal and no different than the other challenges we face.

**NACC:** What do you like to do in your downtime when you're not at work?

**MC:** I like fantasy football and fantasy racing. I am a graduate, and huge fan, of Mississippi State University and there's nothing better than attending a Mississippi State football game. I am also a new grandfather and enjoy spending time with my 5 month old grandson. Family time is very important to me.

**NACC:** What other information would you like our readers to know about your call center?

**MC:** We are always looking for opportunities. We are small at the moment, but MIB is looking to grow the contact center side of our business so we can provide more career-oriented employment opportunities. We would welcome the opportunity to partner or sub-contract with other call centers, especially NACC members and subscribers to the newsletter. We are open to any type of contact center work, including taking overflow calls and seasonal work. No job is too big or small for us. We can be very flexible.

## Remembering Michele Masterson

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, [Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org](mailto:Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org)

The customer service industry lost a good friend and advocate last month when Michele Masterson unexpectedly passed away on July 10th. Even if you didn't know Michele, chances are you've read some of her work over the years. Michele was an editor at Information Today and wrote frequently in Speech Technology magazine and CRM Magazine. That's how I began my business relationship with Michele.

Whether you knew her or not, I invite you to read my blog post tribute to Michele that is on my Saddletree Research website. You will find the post by [clicking here](#).

## An Offer You Can't Refuse From Contact Center Pipeline Magazine!

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, [Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org](mailto:Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org)

In case you missed this "can't miss" offer from last month's newsletter I have decided to run it again so no one has any excuses for not being able to take advantage of this opportunity.

I attended the Verint user group meeting, Engage, in Las Vegas in June and while there I had the chance to meet and chat with Susan Hash, the editor of *Contact Center Pipeline* magazine. Many of you already know I write a monthly column in that magazine and I am personally proud to be associated with it.

For those of you who don't already get Contact Center Pipeline, Susan has generously offered a free digital subscription to any NACC member or subscriber who would like one. All you have to do is go to [www.contactcenterpipeline.com](http://www.contactcenterpipeline.com) and click on the subscribe link. Enter the promo code "NACC" in the box and your invoice will show a total due of \$0.00 for your subscription. I encourage you to subscribe to this excellent industry publication and while you're on the site, be sure to check out my column, "The View from the Saddle."

## Impressive Industry Employment Growth Marks First Half Of 2015

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, [Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org](mailto:Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org)

The first quarter of 2014 was the first quarter that the U.S. contact center industry saw a drop in employment number since the fourth quarter of 2009.

The first quarter of 2014 had the first quarter that the U.S. contact center industry saw a drop in employment numbers since the fourth quarter of 2009, at the height of the recession. There were two major causes of this decline in industry employment. First, there was massive downsizing in the cellular telecommunications industry. We suspect that was due to cellular phone companies looking to cut costs by offshoring routine customer service calls. In an industry with high customer churn and thin margins this is a fairly typical strategy.

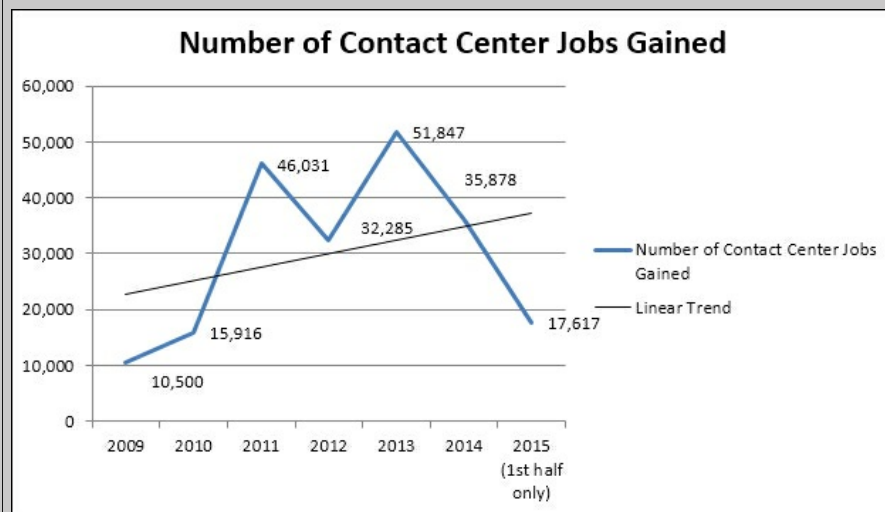
Equally damaging to industry statistics during the first quarter of 2014 was the nationwide reduction in force at health care exchanges that were established in support of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare. The industry clearly hired more agent resources than necessary and when the ACA enrollment period ended there was a substantial reduction in force that hurt the industry.

Based upon the impact the ACA had on the U.S. contact center during the first quarter of 2014 we were expecting a similarly negative impact on the industry for employment during the first quarter of 2015. Thankfully that didn't turn out to be the case.

During the first quarter of 2015 the U.S. contact center gained 12,031 jobs and lost 6,551 jobs for a net gain of 5,480 jobs. Clearly, the industry learned quickly how to better manage employment fluctuations caused by the ACA. Although the contact center with the greatest number of hires during the first quarter of 2015 was a health insurance exchange, the contact center with the greatest number of headcount losses during that same period was a health insurance exchange. These two contact centers essentially cancelled each other out in terms of the impact they had on the industry, leaving what were basically normal employment patterns during the quarter.

The second quarter of 2015 had an even stronger employment showing than the first quarter. During Q2 2015, the industry gained 20,413 jobs and lost 8,276 jobs for a net gain in employment of 12,137 jobs. The financial services market segment led the list of contact centers hiring the greatest number of agents during the quarter. The telecommunications vertical, both wired and wireless, also made a strong showing in terms of employment growth during the second quarter.

While each quarter seems to offer its own version of a roller coaster ride in terms of contact center employment, the U.S. contact center industry overall has seen consistent annual growth since 2009. This growth is illustrated in the graph below.



Source: National Association of Call Centers - August 2015

The trend line indicates an expectation of continued growth in employment and, by extension, continued health in the customer service industry in the years ahead.

## Call Center Comics!



If you like this comic and would like to see more, write Ozzie at [callcentercomics@yahoo.com](mailto:callcentercomics@yahoo.com) and visit his website at [http://callcentercomics.com/cartoon\\_categories.htm](http://callcentercomics.com/cartoon_categories.htm) or just click on the comic to take you to his page. The NACC appreciates Ozzie letting us use some of his comics in our newsletter.

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