



## *In Queue*

The fun, informative and interesting newsletter for  
the call center industry.

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All leading call center companies

### Contact Center Industry: Answer the Call! Put our Veterans2Work

Paul Stockford, SaddleTree Research and NACC Advisory Board  
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The number of disabled veterans in the U.S. has increased 25 percent over the last seven years. Today there are 2.9 million disabled veterans in the U.S. including over 181,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who are receiving disability as of May 2008. A January 2007 report from the Small Business Administration entitled "Self-Employment in the Veteran and Service-Disabled Veteran Population" revealed that during the years 1988 - 2005, 64 percent of service-disabled veterans were unemployed. 32 percent of disabled veterans were employed by an organization of some sort while four percent were self-employed.

As soldiers continue to return from Iraq with devastating injuries that probably would have killed them in previous wars, they will hopefully be rehabilitated and begin seeking gainful employment. What better place for these veterans to find work than as home-based contact center agents?

Veterans2Work (V2W) is a relatively new organization that seeks to find opportunities for disabled people, and particularly disabled veterans, as home-based workers. Run by the contact center industry and Vietnam veteran John Reynolds, V2W is a joint venture with the already-established CORA, which stands for Creating Opportunities by Recognizing Abilities. CORA is a certified training facility that trains, equips and qualifies disabled people for work. CORA can also function as an outsourced facility with disabled workers remaining with CORA but contracting for work with another organization - the classic contact center outsourcing arrangement.

CORA can also train and mentor workers to become direct hires of other companies through a set training period that demonstrates their abilities, typically 90 days, before the disabled worker becomes an employee of the hiring company. V2W's job is to make sure the business community at large knows about the availability of this workforce.

Although the contact center industry as a whole has not fully

and suppliers should examine the new *NACC Underwriting* opportunity in 2008 as evidence of their dedication to the growth of call center industry. See the [2008 Media/Advertising Guide](#) link below for more information.

### Share the Knowledge

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### NACC Investment Portfolio

Stock	Price	Value	Change
NT	7.31	4.02	-5.98
NICE	29.51	7.35	-2.65
VRNT	21.25	8.67	-1.33
SYKE	17.11	9.00	-1.00
WIT	11.14	7.44	-2.56
CVG	12.63	7.15	-2.85
TTEC	13.21	5.74	-4.26
ICTG	8.20	7.87	-2.13
APAC	1.27	5.75	-4.25
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>62.99</b>	<b>-27.01</b>

Original Value start 11/6/2007  
=US\$90.00 or US\$10.00 per stock.

Total Portfolio Value Now= \$62.99

The *NACC Investment Portfolio* lost value the past two weeks. I hate to keep reporting the backwards slide since I am such an optimist. That said, Sykes once again has come through and is holding its own against the eight other stocks retaining \$9 of the original \$10 value. The dog of the pack is Nortel which is now worth only \$4.02 from the original \$10 investment, a loss of 60% of its value!

### NACC Composite Index

embraced the notion of the home-based agent or employee, it's time to get over the misconception that home-based workers are not as productive or reliable as office-based workers. When the idea of home-based workers first appeared in the industry in the mid-1990s, high-speed Internet connectivity to the home was a relatively exotic mystery available to only the most elite of high-tech upper crust. Today just about every home has a high-speed Internet connection. Technology is no longer an issue and neither is the price of maintaining home connectivity.

Whether or not home-based workers goof off more than in-house workers is always subject to debate, but I submit that the particular group of workers we are discussing in this essay offer minimal risk of not working as hard as or harder than their able-bodied in-house counterparts. I don't think I need to spell it out more than that.

V2W also offers American business what I consider to be an additional benefit in that it provides many industries, including the customer service industry, an alternative to sending jobs offshore in order to lower labor costs. With the substantial state and federal tax benefits that come with the hiring of disabled veterans and other workers, or through contracting with organizations such as CORA for outsourced services, there is now a viable financial alternative to sending contact center agent jobs to offshore locations.

As a veteran of the armed forces myself I believe it is vitally important that we take care of our own. Corporate America, and in particular the contact center industry, owes it to itself and to those who have served to consider what V2W might be able to do to help American business, and to help those who have suffered disabilities in service to their country. For more information on V2W visit [www.veterans2work.com](http://www.veterans2work.com) or call John Reynolds at 415-925-1515.

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### If You Consider Yourself a True Patriot Click on the Link Below

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=z5vyAZZPnylUnwiYFwZMrw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=z5vyAZZPnylUnwiYFwZMrw_3d_3d)

Well, it is not really about patriotism. It is an appeal, like patriotism, that makes a good transition from the first essay.

We are in our final stages of the survey evaluating your perceptions of vendors in the call center industry. We have run this survey for the past two issues and this is your last chance to have your thoughts count and to be counted. See how patriotic that sounds?

The more people that participate the larger the sample size and the more valid the results. So please click above and share your thoughts (music and flags in the background and

Date	Value	Change	Percent
11/6/07	100.00		na
11/8/07	94.62	-5.38	-5.69
11/16/07	94.94	0.32	0.34
12/5/07	94.38	-0.56	-0.60
12/26/07	97.90	3.53	3.60
1/15/08	80.89	-17.02	-21.04
1/29/08	77.54	-3.35	-4.31
2/13/08	75.56	-1.98	-2.63
2/27/08	76.72	1.16	1.51
3/12/08	65.47	-11.25	-17.18
3/24/08	67.92	2.45	3.61
4/9/08	68.98	1.06	1.54
4/23/08	74.17	5.19	7.00
5/7/08	77.31	3.14	4.07
5/21/08	78.57	1.26	1.60
6/4/08	81.51	2.93	3.60
6/18/08	80.48	-1.02	-1.27
7/2/08	70.28	-10.20	-14.52
7/16/08	66.13	-4.15	-6.28
7/30/08	66.54	0.41	0.62

The *NACC Composite Index* was up 0.62% percent the past two weeks. This was not a huge gain, but it was in the positive territory and the opposite direction of the *NACC Investment Portfolio*.

Dow Composite	3.06%
S&P 500 Composite	3.03%
NASDAQ Composite	1.93%
NACC Composite	0.62%

The *NACC Composite Index* underperformed all of the other major indices the past two week but the good news is that all indices, including the NACC, were in positive territory. The reasons for this are numerous, but mainly point toward the lower energy prices which are pushing inflation up in most other sectors.

## Real Estate

If you are looking for a new call center location you should check out the [NACC Real Estate](#) page by clicking on this link to see some of the available existing sites.

you move your mouse to the link above, trumpets sounding, crowds cheering for you, the sound is deafening, you are a hero).

## Reader's Response: A Caution on Reward Programs

Art Coombs, CEO KomBea Corporation,  
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The recommendations in the "Rewarding Behavior" articles in the July 4th and July 18th issues of the In Queue Newsletter were right on the money. But I want to offer a word of caution on over relying on them.

I have implemented agent rewards programs following parameters and using automated tools just like Mr. Cabrera recommended with great anticipation of success in his essays. I would get really excited when I saw an up tick in performance.

But in every case those performance lifts were either noise (common cause variation in Six Sigma parlance) or short lived signals that regressed to the long term average. I would then look for more ideas I could throw at the wall in hopes they would help me lift and sustain improved performance. I implemented dozens and dozens of programs like these over the years that I ran in call centers all over the globe. In my experience, they don't drive sustained improvements in performance.

Employee motivation initiatives do have a place in our centers, but they need to rest on a solid foundation of improvement efforts that are empirically lifting performance and leading to sustained gains. Tools like process experimentation to determine which steps matter and which don't, tool automation, agent-assisted voice solutions, error-proofing, etc.

Once your processes are performing at a high level with low between agent variability, you can use reward programs to do what they were originally intended for-to build camaraderie, make work fun, and create lasting memories. My experience in call centers has confirmed to me that the only way to achieve measurable year-over-year improvement across the entire center is by first focusing on the "process" and then focusing on the agent.

## Inside Jokes

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## Quotes

I thought this quote was appropriate given the first essay of this issue, the US presidential elections, and the fact that it is from one of my all-time-favorite US presidents.

*Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the president.*

Theodore Roosevelt (1858 - 1919)

## Picture of the Week



This is a spider looking statue about 20 feet tall in the Tuilleries Gardens in Paris. This is one of many statues that adorn this area in central Paris. Behind this statue is the famous Louvre Museum which used to be the castle/chateau of the king. The Tuilleries Gardens were actually the playground (think backyard) of the castle where the nobles would go out, walk, fool around, etc. in their own private expansive garden. Since the French revolution, the chateau has become a world-famous museum and the gardens are now open to all the public and display large spider-like statues.

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Before I talk about an inside joke in call centers, I need to tell you about an inside joke in Tucson, AZ. Tucson is teeming with wildlife and I don't mean at the University. Many homes are built up against mountains and washes. Some of the denizens include mountain lions, bobcats, bears, coyotes, javelina, hawks, owls, and rattle snakes.

One implication is that should Fluffy the cat or Toto the lap-dog wander the property line for more than ten minutes, there is a good chance they will end up as a puff-pastry for one of the locals. When Fluffy or Toto don't come back, Mom and Dad know what's happened but the children don't. They insist on putting signs on poles that say "Lost Cat: White. Furry. Responds to Fluffy. Call if you find her." When you see those signs, you feel bad, but you also kind of chuckle imagining Mom and Dad going through the motions.

The inside joke in call centers occurs when someone wants to make a change to a live call handling procedure. This change could come from a regulatory change, a best practice that has been discovered, or because Marketing decides they want to brand calls differently. Marketing might say, "Let's just get all the agents to change and start doing it like this."

Though the call center leaders agree to it, anyone who manages agents knows that getting hundreds of agents, often in different centers, "to change and start doing it like this" is, as they say, "a long putt." The leaders know it is going to take a lot of effort and a lot of time and it is never going to be 100%. At best, without heavy policing from call monitors and big rewards/sanctions, it will take months for that process change to become fully adopted, which usually means it is being done about 85% of the time.

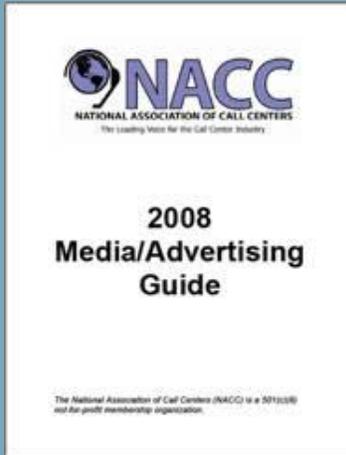
In a center handling credit card calls, Marketing decided they wanted to brand the end of every call differently depending on what happened during the call. They took 250 agents off the phones for an hour (which turned into almost two hours off the phones). They trained the agents on the reason for the change and the change itself, gave them some time to practice, put them back on the phones, updated the monitoring forms, and began sample monitoring.

After over 500 hours of lost productivity and lots of training/monitoring effort, the compliance rate was less than 40% after two months.

This is not surprising. Behavior change is extraordinarily difficult. You know this if you ever made New Year's resolutions or if you have ever tried to take off a little weight. Even people who have faced death as a result of a heart-attack are very often unable to change their health jeopardizing behavior.

Processes are constantly being changed in call centers. It is almost impossible to put in the required effort to communicate, change the scripts, monitoring forms and training, and follow through to make sure all the agents know

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and make the change. Some leaders just resort to using email or a "chair drop" or a single team meeting. In the heat of a constantly changing battle, who can blame them? But trying to change agent behavior with a chair drop? Let's not kid ourselves.

We have to get better at this. When a change comes down for any reason, the rest of the organization needs to be able to count on us to get it right, not in a few months, not at 85% compliance, but at nearly 100% the very day the change is announced.

Impossible, you say. We can't get agents to change that fast nor be that perfect.

In the credit card example, a subset of agents was using an agent-assisted voice solution. The new endings were built right into the flow which made it almost impossible for the agents to not play them when they were supposed to. In fact, the pilot agents were 97% compliant with Marketing's new endings on Day 1 and were at 99.999% compliance after three days and stayed at that level for the remaining month of the pilot. This was accomplished without any effort from quality monitoring. A simple report showed what recordings were played on every single call.

Possible, I say. And long overdue.

## Call Center Comics



**JAKE COULD ALWAYS TELL WHEN IT WAS TIME FOR A CALL QUALITY FEEDBACK SESSION.**

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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