

Case Study: Establishing Remote Agents for a Non-Profit Contact/Call Center

At a Glance:

The Problem:

- Weather Disruptions to Contact/Call Center Operations

The Solution:

- Remote Agent Capability

The Results:

- Remote Agent Pilot Program

One of our clients, a non-profit organization, was facing problems meeting the call volume in their contact/call center. Under normal conditions, their team could handle the usual peaks and valleys of call traffic, but several times a year, circumstances would make this impossible. In late 2015, a winter storm caused major disruptions to their 50 agent contact/call center. Due to extreme snowfall and accumulation, their staff was either stranded at home, in the office, or otherwise unable to reach the contact/call center. With just a single weather forecast, their entire customer service strategy was disabled, and their reputation was on the line. The company even had to arrange lodging for their stranded agents in a nearby hotel.

Worse yet, this wasn't the first time something like this had happened, but it would be the last. They contacted Mindsight, and together we searched for a solution to this debilitating and recurring problem.

The Solution: Remote Agent Capabilities

The client was interested in establishing remote agent capabilities for their contact/call center in a limited capacity. They did not need to have agents working from home every day or every week. All they required was a contingency plan for when factors prevented agents from reaching the office.

The plan was to establish a remote agent "task force" that would be notified in the event of inclement weather (or another scenario where workers could not make it into the office) and informed to simply take calls from home.

Through this solution, the non-profit could provide ample coverage regardless of the circumstance.

Establishing Remote Agents: Choices, Concerns, and Caveats

As with anything in IT, deploying this solution wasn't as easy as flipping a switch. There were a number of decisions that had to be made in order for the program to be a success. The first of which was what deployment model the contact/call center should use.

Choosing a Deployment Model

For remote agent functionality, we provided our client with two options. The first option involved a softphone on a laptop. The laptop would use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to connect and sync with the

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contact/call center platform. The remote agent would then take calls from the queue on their company laptop.

The second option was to purchase physical phones along with laptops and provide them to each agent in the task force. With this equipment, the agents could establish home offices and connect to the company network with a VPN. Once connected, they could take calls and operate exactly as if they were in the contact/call center. Ultimately, the client selected the second option.

Personal Internet Connections

The next decision that had to be made involved bandwidth and integration. The client had a policy of recording all calls with their customers—any remote calls received by the task force must have the same capability. From a technical standpoint, that was not difficult to do, but it wasn't without its caveats.

The client's existing call recording software worked by tunneling a separate stream of data to the recording server, in addition to the normal data transfer created by a standard voice over internet protocol (VoIP) call. Additionally, the task force's home internet connection had to support the company's CRM needs. This meant that any call placed remotely would eat up more bandwidth than just a phone call. It wasn't a large amount, but it could rule out those agents with antiquated internet connections.

To maintain service levels, Mindsight drafted minimum internet standards for the task force. In order to apply to join the remote agent team, the agent's home must meet the necessary requirements to ensure their internet can handle the technology involved.

The Pilot Phase

With the technical aspects implemented and configured, our client then decided to pilot the program for testing. Once a week, agents who had been accepted into the task force practiced working in a home environment and reported any complications. Through this process, we confirmed that all aspects of the deployment were operating effectively. As minor bandwidth problems at the agent's homes arose, the IT team worked to compensate for them. At this time, four agents are involved in the pilot program and in the future, the company intends to expand it to more of the staff.

When the next big snow storm hits, our client will be ready.

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