



Light Years Ahead

Remote Agent Solution from eOn Communications Gives ARO Competitive Advantage for Winning Business, Attracting Talent

Some Friday afternoons the only employee working in the Kansas City contact center of Accounts Receivable Options (ARO) is the floor supervisor. In fact, on most days 75 percent of ARO's nearly 125 customer service representatives (CSRs) don't come to the office. And Lester Ham, president of the 15-year-old service bureau, wouldn't have it any other way.

"An empty contact center is proof that our business model is working," smiles Ham, whose organization has accomplished what other call-center providers dream of: a stable remote workforce that consistently exceeds market standards for productivity.

"In just over three years we transformed ourselves from traditional in-house staffing to virtually all remote CSRs," says Ham. "As a result, we're attracting and retaining more skilled employees, we've controlled the costs of our tremendous growth, and major corporate customers are choosing us because we're truly an innovator in our field."



Complexity and alienation have burdened companies of all sorts pursuing the remote-worker model. Building a seamless communications infrastructure is a must to ensure employee productivity and create a sense of connection with the enterprise. ARO achieved this goal with customer contact technology from eOn Communications.

"For the remote model to succeed," Ham explains, "You need a communications solution that creates no distinction between in-house agents and remote agents. Our CSRs sitting at home can work at the same speed and capability as those sitting in the office."

eOn's eQueue™ Multi-Media Contact Center Solution makes this seamless environment possible. With the eQueue's Remote Agent capabilities, ARO sustains a business model that attracts talented workers and prestigious customers.

"eOn is light years ahead of the competition in remote agent capabilities," praises Ham.



Customer Story

eOn Customer Success Story:

Accounts Receivable Options Inc.

The Challenge

ARO's remote agent strategy hatched about four years ago when the company's management spotted two business trends on course to collide with each other.

"The Kansas City area is home to nearly 100 call centers," explains Michael Amigoni, ARO's vice president in charge of operations and information technology. "Our expertise in staffing over the past 12 years enabled us to anticipate an eventual labor shortage in the customer service market."

For many years, ARO has cultivated a thriving seminar and conference support business. On behalf of the organizations staging such events, ARO service representatives contact registrants to confirm schedules, locations, payment information and other attendance details. These types of calls average 2-3 minutes. In recent years, the company also has added an insurance services division. This segment has quickly exploded and since grown 300 percent. ARO representatives conduct 20-minute interviews with health insurance policyholders to obtain and update medical history information.



"By industry standards, this is a long interaction that requires exceptional service skills and extraordinary attention to detail," Amigoni says. "We needed to attract the best and brightest talent in the marketplace to accommodate the personnel

demands of our explosive growth in all segments of our business. But how were we going to elevate above such a crowd of competition?"

A remote agent model was the answer. The ease and flexibility of working from a home office appealed most to the largest sector of the labor pool — Baby Boomers. Unlike their entry-level cohorts, these experienced workers offer ARO proven service skills, professional maturity and the stability of established lifestyles. Furthermore, the absence of commuting time afforded ARO space in the workday for molding shifts efficiently around call volume patterns. As another plus, ARO avoided the hassle and expense of continually expanding office space to keep pace with meteoric growth.

"There were a lot of technical issues to cover," Amigoni asserts. "Phone connections must be stable... calls must be routed properly... software must identify callers accurately... supervisors must be able to monitor any and all agent calls for quality... CSRs must be able to

collaborate as though they're in the same room... Failing to address any one of these issues can sabotage the remote agent model."

"eOn's solution has an answer for all of them," Amigoni says.

The Solution

eOn's eQueue Multi-Media Contact Center Solution provides ARO with an integrated contact distribution system that handles the complete connection spectrum. Remote CSRs can access the contact center network via dial-up, cable modem or Internet. ARO's fully redundant infrastructure allows the eQueue to sidestep service outages by shifting banks of callers to different sets of lines.

Supervisors have a comprehensive set of administrative tools to manage remote and in-house agents in the same way; the remote model requires no specialized management structure.

Like many contact centers, ARO maintains an array of 800 phone lines that must be answered differently according to customer requirements. eOn's solution ensures customer recognition by notifying CSRs two ways — on their workstation screen and over the phone connection. If the identification software on the PC is off-line, CSRs can still recognize the caller.

To support a team atmosphere among co-workers spread across the city and surrounding countryside, the eQueue enables ARO to manage all agents in precisely the same way. Each CSR — whether remote or in-house — has an extension in the phone system.

WORK WITHOUT PANTS

Work @ Home with shorts, sweats or whatever you're comfortable with... Join the ranks of many telecommuters by logging into ARO's automated call center and handling medical interview calls for insurance companies.

Requirements:
PC / 233 MGHZ processor or higher
64 MB RAM
COMPLETELY NOISE-FREE ENVIRONMENT
2 local phone lines
Attend paid training sessions at ARO
F/T M-TH 11:30-9pm, Sat. 8-Noon
P/T M-TH 5-9pm, Sat. 8-Noon
Submit resume to ARO, Work At Home, 3100 Broadway, Suite 100. KCMO 64111

A supervisor can contact any CSR in the system just by dialing the extension; no special procedure is required for remote workers. The same is true for coaching and monitoring service calls for ongoing training and quality assurance. Likewise, all CSRs can reach one another with the same ease. The brick and mortar contact center and the network of home offices are a single system.

Amigoni says the remote agent structure is flexible for the CSRs and for the company: "When you have all the workers physically under one roof, maintaining productivity for everyone all the time is tough. With the remote model, resources can be tuned up or down as call volume rises and falls. For example, remote CSRs can sign-on for peak morning hours, sign-off during the mid-day lull and sign-on again for the heavier night period. Many employees work a full day and still have the afternoon off."

Remote agent and reporting capabilities are integrated parts of the system. And while the heart of ARO's business today is voice interaction, the eQueue enables the company to expand easily into e-mail and Web chat contact channels. Add the fact that eOn's solution readily scales to thousands of agents, and the eQueue lends plenty of room for growth.



"When we review a deal, for example, that requires 75 more CSRs," Amigoni

elaborates, "Additional operating costs, such as office space, office furniture, computers, even parking fees, are not a large factor in determining profitability anymore. And, of course, we can ramp up fast. If our business continues to grow at more than 100 percent each year, we don't need to worry about adding square footage. We can add virtual space to our contact center by hiring remote agents."

The Rewards

The average age of an ARO CSR is 47. The company's turnover rate for its remote workers is 2 to 3 percent, which is extraordinarily low compared to typical call center statistics. eOn's eQueue also allows ARO to maintain an extremely efficient ratio of one supervisor for every 20 agents. Most traditional call centers require a ratio closer to one to 10.

"We've found remote employees are consistently 10 to 20 percent more productive than in-house staff," Amigoni asserts. "Another bonus we discovered is that the older, more experienced workers we attract empathize and relate well to the people they talk with, who are typically in their peer group. This raises the satisfaction of the interviewees and the CSRs. That's why our people stay longer and become more and more knowledgeable and valuable."

That's also why a major financial services company that outsources its insurance applications chose ARO to service the business.

"The strategy for many of our competitors is to hire young and save personnel cost," says Ham. "We choose to compete by using a business model that lowers operating costs and raises the value of our people at the same time. As a consequence, in a city filled with call centers, we have a waiting list of job candidates."

"eOn's remote agent capabilities provides us with significant competitive advantage in winning the best people and the best customers," Ham affirms.

The ARO Contact Center Solution

eOn eQueue Multi-Media Contact Center Solution

Unified Routing for Customer Interaction Management: Single queue for all media types – voice, e-mail and web communications – improves customer service and loyalty, increases agent productivity, and lowers total cost of ownership.

Comprehensive Applications including E-mail and Web Chat: Applications include, e-mail, Web chat and Web collaboration with comprehensive knowledge database, integrated voice response, voice mail with unified messaging, fax messaging, quality assurance recording, complete telephony capability and a complete range of desktop devices and applications.

Proven and Reliable Platform: Bridging the gap from traditional call centers to new web-enabled contact centers by applying years of experience in designing robust solutions for the demanding requirements of multi-media contact centers.

Open Solution: Linux™-based system provides a completely open architecture, ensuring customers have more choices with consistent and personalized service delivery, as well as consolidated tracking and reporting of all customer contacts.

eQueue Remote Agent: Comprehensive reporting, monitoring, and SoftPhone capabilities ensure virtual agents are part of the contact center regardless of location, improving agent retention and reducing operating expenses.





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