


FRONTLINE CALL CENTER

Outsourced Call Center Triples Business in Two Years with inContact


 If you're looking for proof that not all on-demand call center technology is created equal, consider the experience of outsourced customer support service Frontline Call Center. After a year of struggling with a hosted telephony provider and plagued by problems ranging from excessive system downtime to inadequate reporting software, Frontline switched to inContact's cloud-based platform to carry, route and track customer calls. **Over the next two years, »Frontline's annual revenues tripled to more than \$2 million, »average agent utilization jumped from 40% to 78%, and »the agent workforce expanded from 28 to 75 including at-home agents in 12 states – all fueled by inContact's reliable performance and robust functionality.**



Business

Outsourced customer support
frontlinecallcenter.com

Challenges

- Growth stunted by inadequate hosted telephony service
- Excessive system downtime
- 25% of revenues unbillable
- Low agent utilization
- Hard to track at-home agents
- Expensive change fees
- Poor technical support
- Need for low-cost solution

Results

- 400% growth in two years
- 99.99% system uptime
- All agent revenues captured
- Agent utilization doubled
- 60% at-home workforce
- Self-serve customization
- New features not previously available
- No upfront equipment costs
- No maintenance or upgrade responsibilities
- Good technical support

SaaS by Necessity

For Frontline, premises-based call center equipment was not an option. The company is located off the coast of Washington on tiny Orcas Island, where both technical and financial resources as well as qualified employees are scarce. In writing her business plan in 2005, founder and president Jill Blankenship recognized that those limitations dictated the use of the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model for her new company's phone switch, automatic call distributor (ACD), interactive voice response system (IVR) and related components. That was the only way she could fulfill her vision of supplying outsourced customer service, technical support and associated services to corporate clients.

“We're located 90 minutes from the Washington mainland by ferry. We didn't have the budget or maintenance capabilities for installed infrastructure, and we knew we couldn't rely exclusively on a local workforce because the entire population of Orcas Island is less than 4,500. We needed to be able to recruit people from other areas as we grew,” Blankenship said. “SaaS-based call centers were just emerging, and that model offered low price, low upkeep, and the ability to add home agents anywhere in the country at virtually no cost.”

Dialing for Help

Accordingly, Frontline looked for a vendor that could provide a hosted call center platform requiring no on-site call center equipment installation except computers and standard phones. The first service that Frontline selected, however, suffered from serious deficiencies that hampered the company's 24x7 operations.

The provider's application software was typically down two hours a week for maintenance, preventing tracking of calls handled during that time. It lacked key features such as skills-based routing and email and chat support required by many prospective clients. And it was unable to match agent time spent on outbound callbacks to a specific customer account, making 17% of Frontline's work unbillable. That, in combination with the system downtime, left the company able to charge for only 75% of its work.

Blankenship was also dissatisfied with the service's reporting software, offshored technical support, and inability to accommodate even basic staffing or IVR script changes without expensive professional services. In 2007, Frontline went looking for a new provider.

inContact to the Rescue

After evaluating other on-demand call center offerings, Blankenship and her team selected the inContact platform for its reliability, comprehensive software suite and strong customer references. inContact went live with 28 seats in October 2007 after a smooth two-month rollout that included integration with Microsoft Dynamics CRM via a pre-built Microsoft adapter for caller tracking.

“Our business has grown dramatically since we switched to inContact, and there is a direct correlation. They provide us with a reliable platform, a cutting-edge feature set that is continually updated, and a support team I can count on. We know from experience that you can't expect that from every technology provider.”

Jill Blankenship, President
Frontline Call Center

The business impact has been dramatic. Frontline's revenues soared by nearly 225% in the first year alone, then jumped an additional 175% over the next 12 months despite a recession-battered economy. The switch to inContact also spurred a near-doubling of agent utilization and associated profitability during the same period.

Blankenship credits inContact's 99.99% system uptime, efficiency features like skills-based routing and automatic callback, and ability to capture all agent calls, email, chat and post-call activity for billing purposes. inContact reporting tools also contributed by identifying agent performance weaknesses that could be improved through training.

Other inContact functionality not available from the previous provider has streamlined Frontline's internal processes as well as enhancing client services. The company can now retrieve call logs with a click, for example, and customize client campaigns or define agent roles such as Tier 1, 2 or 3 support on a self-serve basis instead of waiting and paying for the service provider's technicians. Clients themselves have online access to information ranging from call logs and

recordings to Frontline's compliance with service level agreements. And new features are added continually.

“When inContact added click-to-call, that gave us a new tool enabling our clients' customers to connect to an agent from their website without picking up the phone. When they added support for Salesforce CRM, we were able to interface with that application for customers who needed it,” Blankenship said. “Each of these enhancements gives clients and prospects another reason to use our services.”

60% Home-Based Agents

Frontline's transition to the inContact platform also has made it possible to meet growing staffing needs by taking full advantage of the easy and inexpensive home agent support that is a hallmark of the on-demand call center model. By early 2010, 60% of Frontline's agent base worked at home as far away as Virginia, Georgia and North Carolina. Only a broadband connection, computer and standard phone are required for setup, and agents are monitored with inContact's reporting tools.

The benefits have extended far beyond the ability to hire experienced agents outside the small island community where Frontline is located. “Our agents who work at home tend to be more mature, have more schedule flexibility, are sick less, and allow us to ramp up quickly if we have unexpectedly heavy call volumes because of a particularly compelling client promotion or infomercial,” Blankenship noted. “We can literally have extra people staffing the phones within one or two minutes.”

Remote Success

For all those reasons, inContact has played a starring role in Frontline's rapid growth. With smart leadership, empowered agents and inContact as the virtual technology backbone, Blankenship has forged a successful business that has provided her with a year-round income for the first time since she moved to Orcas Island and its tourist-dominated economy in 1998.

Blankenship has also realized unanticipated benefits, including the ability to create new revenue streams by hosting other call centers on the inContact platform. “Switching telephony providers is the smartest business decision I ever made next to coming up with the Frontline concept in the first place,” she said. “We could have the best agents in the world, but it wouldn't matter if we didn't have the technology to support them. With inContact, we have everything we need to optimize our own operations as well as service to our customers. The technology is helping us attract accounts and keep them, too.”