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Ten Business Reasons To Consider Home-Based Agents

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By now, you're probably familiar with the basics of the home-based contact center model. You may have heard that there are cost-savings to be recognized from using agents working from home, or that using home-based workers is a nice alternative to sending calls offshore.

The truth is, the real value proposition offered by the use of home-based agents is much more compelling than that. What you may not have heard are the overwhelming business benefits of using home-based agents, and why looking at this business decision from a total cost of ownership perspective is most important. Here are 10 of the top reasons to consider using a home-based call center solution.

1. *Quality of agents* –The single most important advantage to using the home-based contact center model is, by far, higher quality agents. At Alpine Access, more than 75 percent of our home-based agent employees have a college education, and more than 8 percent have a post-graduate degree. The average age of our home-based employees is 41. Compare that to workers in a traditional bricks and mortar call center, where the average age is 23 and fewer than 20 percent have a college degree, and it's easy to see that, with home-based workers, you get more mature, better-educated agents who provide better service.
2. *Impact on bottom line* – Better agents mean better performance, and a positive impact on the bottom line. Companies using home-based agents report increased customer satisfaction, larger average order size and increased conversion rates, which speaks volumes about the service callers are receiving. For one client, for example, our home-based agents' average order size is up to *30 percent higher* than the average order size of the company's own, in-house call center agents.
3. *Customer satisfaction* – One of the most compelling reasons to consider using home-based call center agents is that your customers are demanding better care. Businesses today are reaching an inflexion point where customers want more from their interactions with customer service representatives; simply answering a customer contact in a specified timeframe is no longer enough. Your customers want to speak with someone who understands their needs without detailed explanations or constant repetition, and home-based agents deliver.

4. *Brand promotion* – We’ve all heard that a satisfied customer typically tells one to three people about a good experience, while an unsatisfied customer talks to as many as 10 people about the bad experience. Think about your own experience; we all have at least one nightmare customer service story that we chime in with when the water cooler conversation inevitably takes a turn down this path. One of the best ways to protect your brand from being dragged through the mud is to make sure you’re taking the best possible care of your customers by using home-based agents.
5. *Redundancy* – Another important benefit of home-based contact center outsourcing is the unique opportunity to create a true, fully-redundant service offering. Traditional call centers can implement redundant hardware and software infrastructures to provide high systems availability, but routing calls and data to an alternative location in an emergency is not very helpful if the agents all live near the primary (and now non-operational) facility. Building multi-location redundancy in a home-based employee model, with agents dispersed over wide geographic areas, provides the ultimate redundant infrastructure, which has paid off for our clients time and time again in the wake of hurricanes, blizzards, and other disaster situations.
6. *Agent profiling* – Let’s say, for a moment, that you work for Harley Davidson. What if all of your contact center agents could be Harley owners, riders, and enthusiasts? Through the use of home-based agents, they can. Home-based call center providers can screen applicants for specific skills, interests and experience, hiring only those whose profile meets that of your customers, or those who already know and love your product.

The reason the home-based employee model can deliver on the promise of providing better matched, higher quality agents is straightforward: the larger the pool of candidates from which a company hires its agents, the more selective the company can be in the quality of those agents. At Alpine Access, we received nearly *120,000* job applications in 2006. This kind of applicant pool means we really are hiring only the best of the best. It also means we can hand-pick agents from specific geographies, such as agents with a regional dialect or familiarity with a regional product, if necessary.

7. *Scalability*. Because home-based agents don’t have to deal with commute times, they’re much more readily available than agents in a physical call center. By enlisting the help of agents who are trained on a given call type, but not normally scheduled during that time, it is possible to increase staffing significantly, even doubling or tripling the staff available within a matter of minutes. This kind of scalability is simply not possible when workers have to commute to an office, and it means companies can respond quickly and effectively to forecasted surges in call volume like the holiday season, as well as unforecasted spikes in call volume, such as a weather-related incident that affects business.
8. *Operational efficiency* – Whereas a traditional bricks and mortar center is only fully efficient when it has its seats filled by agents on the phone, the home-based model is able to be far more flexible in meeting the exact call forecasts for client companies.

Alpine Access, for example, schedules agents in fifteen minute increments according to our clients' forecasts. That means less overstaffing and less understaffing than a traditional center.

Just recently, a public call center company stated that it missed its fourth quarter earnings because of winter weather that impacted agents' abilities to come into a call center for work. During the same weather, Alpine Access agents were at work as expected, unaffected by the snow and other issues because they were already at their office. Productivity gains are made throughout the year in just these ways.

9. *U.S.-based employees* – By using home-based agents, your company is keeping valuable jobs — often filled by stay-at-home moms, retirees or disabled workers — in the U.S. Of course, there's more to be said for this than just altruism. By utilizing U.S. workers, businesses are contributing to a vibrant national economy which, ultimately, pays dividends in revenues for your company.
10. *It's easy* – The concept of the home-based call center is no longer new. Companies like ours have been providing this service for nearly 10 years, and the model is becoming more and more mainstream every day, with savvy businesses in nearly every industry making the switch. Good home-based contact center providers will handle all of the hiring, training and managing of employees, and can make the technology work with virtually any client system.