



March 19, 2007

Another Airline Goes Home Agent-Based

By Tracey E. Schelmetic
Editorial Director,
Customer Interaction Solutions magazine

Let's face it... when it comes to airlines, there are a lot of choices. Unless you're wedded to one carrier because that's where your earned air miles are (admittedly not an uncommon situation), or you have found a carrier that leaves you in utter bliss every time you fly with them (if there is someone like that out there, I want to meet him or her), you have a lot of opportunity to shop around. Most people base their choice in airlines on flight times and availabilities, price and customer service.

In other words, I want good customer service, but I don't want to pay a lot. This scenario used to be considered an oxymoron in the airline industry.

Increasingly, airlines are turning to the home agent model for a number of reasons. First, they can get high-quality, U.S.-based agents for less money, since they're not paying the considerable overhead involved in a physical call center. Second, they are distributing their workforce around the country, which means they have built-in disaster recovery systems...no chance of a single storm, a most trying time for an airline, to take down an entire call center.

Finally, a home-based workforce, by its very nature, seeks flexible schedules with varying days and shifts, which means you can staff round-the-clock quite easily without needing to build second and third shifts into your physical call center. You can also add call center support in minutes to deal with spikes in volume merely by calling extra agents and asking them to log on immediately.

Today, another carrier announced it has turned to the home agent model.

Alpine Access, a provider of home-agent-based customer care solutions, announced that it has been contracted by ExpressJet Airlines, Inc. to handle inbound customer service and reservation calls for the company's branded flying services. ExpressJet will begin service under its own name in April, with more than 220 daily flights to 24 cities in the West, Midwest and Southeast sections of the U.S. Alpine Access began handling ExpressJet's inbound calls in late January.

ExpressJet, which states that it differentiates itself by delivering quality service throughout its organization, sought a company with strong travel experience that could help communicate the quality and attributes of a premium brand at each customer touch point. Alpine Access fit the bill.

“After evaluating several call center solutions, we found Alpine Access’ home-based employee model uniquely suited to deliver quality customer service in a scalable way that improves our operational efficiency and supports our corporate culture,” said Jim Ream, president and CEO of ExpressJet.

Ream continued: “By partnering with Alpine Access, we not only get the best-matched agents to handle our calls, but also a partner that supports our dedication to delivering quality service to each of our customers, every day.”

Alpine Access has been a provider of the home-based employee model since the company's inception in 1998. With this model, agents are recruited, screened and hired through a rigorous process that identifies their unique skills, passions and experiences. These employees are then assigned by Alpine Access to a single client that matches their profile.

As a result of this rigorous process, clients know that the agents handling their customer service calls are passionate, qualified and possess unique knowledge of their particular industry. Alpine Access' agent-match program has proven to have positive financial benefits with better results for one-call resolution, customer satisfaction, conversions, customer retention and average order sizes.

“Operational efficiencies are critical to the success of companies like ExpressJet,” noted Christopher Carrington, CEO of Alpine Access. “This financial focus, in addition to their dedication to total customer care, matches our own company philosophy and makes this a strong combination that will result in satisfied customers.

Carrington added: “We are thrilled to bring the unique capabilities and benefits of our home-based customer care solution to ExpressJet, and look forward to working with them as they continue to grow their company.”

For more information about Alpine Access, visit www.alpineaccess.com.