



## CallCenter

TECHNOLOGIES, SERVICES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONTACT CENTERS

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## Best of Call Center Demo and Conference Dallas

**We tip our ten-gallon hats to the award-winning products and services at the first call center event of 2002.**

By the editors

03/04/2002, 6:10 PM ET

Visualize agents wearing headsets that don't require earphones. Picture customers getting the information they need from the same knowledge base by phone or on-line. Imagine your center retaining top agents because of the incentives you offer.

All this is possible with the three products and services to which we gave Best of Show awards at Call Center Demo and Conference in Dallas, this year's first call center show.

As you read about them, keep in mind that you will have opportunities yearlong to see more new call center products and services in action. Our next call center show in Orlando, FL, will take place from May 8th through May 10th. We invite you to visit [www.callcenterdemo.com](http://www.callcenterdemo.com) for further details about this event.

In the meantime, here's what the top products and services we saw in Dallas can contribute to your call center.

### APALU'S ANSWER SYSTEM

Apalu's (Addison, TX) Answer System is ideal for assisting customers who regularly call or visit your Web site to request answers to the same questions.

You use Answer System to build a knowledge base of on-line documents. The software consists of modules that let your center provide automated responses through your knowledge base or answers from live agents.

For Web site visitors, Apalu WebEmployee handles the automated responses, and ApaluWebChat begins a text chat session with an agent if the knowledge base

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doesn't contain answers to an on-line customer's question.

For callers, Apalu Phone Employee relies on speech recognition to convert information in your knowledge base to synthesized speech. If the answer to a caller's question isn't in the knowledge base, ApaluPhoneChat directs a recording of the question to an agent, who types in a response. The module converts the text to synthesized speech, and plays back the response to the caller.

Other modules enable you to update the knowledge base, as well as report on the types of questions your center receives.

Apalu's Answer System earns a Best of Show award because it is among the few new products that let call centers offer automated assistance to both callers and on-line visitors.

Virtual Employee Knowledge Center, the knowledge base that callers or on-line visitors can access, starts at \$50,000. For each individual at your company who updates and adds to the knowledge base, per-user pricing is \$3,000.

The cost of Apalu Phone Employee is \$10,000 multiplied by the number of customers you expect to call your speech rec system at the same time. If your center doesn't already use speech rec software, Apalu can connect you with a hosted speech rec network, and charges by the minute to access the network. For agents who respond to customers' questions, the per-seat price is \$5,000.

Apalu offers a reporting module with Answer System that lets you know, for example, the top ten questions from callers, the top ten questions from on-line customers, and the responses they received. This module has an initial set-up cost of \$25,000, plus \$3,000 for each manager or administrator who generates reports. 972-764-3566, [www.apalu.com](http://www.apalu.com)

## **DOWUMI'S VONIA CALL CENTER HEADSETS AND AMPLIFIER**

Headsets are necessities in call centers, but that doesn't mean agents always enjoy wearing them.

What is it about conventional headsets that annoys agents? It's often the headphones, which rest directly on agents' ears, not always comfortably, and which pick up souvenirs of previous wearers: earwax, fungi and who knows what else. Because headphones cover the ears, agents have to remove headsets to hear colleagues and supervisors when they're not on calls.

Not so with Dowumi's (Inchon, Korea) Vonia EZ-3000S headsets. Instead of headphones that send sound through the ear canal, the Vonia headsets have transducers that rest on the temples and transmit sound to the inner ear. The units also have flip-up pads that deflect outside noise away from the ears so agents can hear calls clearly.

During the show, we tried Dowumi's headsets, which plugged into a Vonia F30 amplifier from Dowumi attached to a phone set. Even on the busy show floor, we could understand the people we were speaking with on the phone. The ear pads gently muffled but did not interfere with the sound around us.

Except for the slight pressure of the transducers, we barely felt we were wearing headsets. We certainly didn't have the sensation of clamp-like boom boxes that

we've experienced with headphones on some headsets. The units come with noise-canceling microphones, which enabled the people we spoke with to hear us, too.

Dowumi has two models of headsets for call centers. The difference between them is cosmetic. On the EZ-3000S units, which we tried, the transducers sit in front of each ear. On the EZ-4000S units, the transducers sit below and behind the ear.

Both models come with the F30 amplifiers. The list price of each model, including the amplifiers, is \$250. The headsets blend innovation, comfort and style in sleek, lightweight models. This combination led us to give them a Best of Show award. 408-844-8505, [www.dowumi.com](http://www.dowumi.com)

## **RYI SOLUTIONS' INCENTIVE PROGRAMS**

Agents make your call center. Your company's success in sales, service and customer retention depends on how well agents do their jobs.

You can't afford to lose your top performers. Even with today's soft economy and higher unemployment rates, it costs a lot of money - between 15% and 50% of an agent's annual wage - to recruit, train and bring a new hire up to speed.

One way to retain agents, on top of good working conditions and decent salaries, is to offer incentives. These can include prizes, gift certificates and trophies for agents who meet or exceed your performance standards.

There is little point in offering incentives unless you evaluate and reward agents fairly. To do this, your center may need tools such as computer-based training or performance measurement software, plus resources like sales training courses.

Selecting the right incentives can be difficult. For example, tickets to events are sometimes more appropriate than financial rewards, especially for agents who belong to a union and cannot receive monetary prizes.

How do you know what incentive programs are best for your center? A company that offers one of the most comprehensive services to help you is RYI Solutions (Irving, TX).

RYI thoroughly analyzes your center's challenges in staffing, training and retaining agents before helping you to select an incentive program. RYI then assists you with administering the program, including logistics like inventory and distribution of awards.

As many businesses grapple with hiring freezes and corporate budget cuts, recognition becomes all the more critical to keeping a good team together. RYI's appeal: The company hinges its success on the performance of agents; the outfit doesn't charge for services until agents earn rewards. That's an approach you'll appreciate. And it's one reason why RYI Solutions' services win a Best of Show award.