

Fiscal incentives to improve employment tenure

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NEW DELHI: The Indian contact centre industry reports its primary challenges for 2008 as employee attrition, recruitment, agent training and implementing new service channels. Indian contact centre executives are attempting to improve human resource management results by offering financial incentives, reward and recognition programmes and better career planning for agents. However, average tenure for an Indian contact centre agent is lowest in the region at 9 months.

Today marks the release of the 2008 Asian Contact Centre Industry Benchmarking Report. The report details results from contact centre industries in India, Singapore, China, The Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand.

The research, sponsored by Autonomy etalk and Genesys, involved inter-

viewing 539 contact centres executives representing 2,488 contact centres and 259,699 contact centre seats across Asia. The study assessed contact centre strategy, revenue generation, operations, human resource management, technology, customer service, channel management, outsourcing, key performance indicators and management challenges. A total of 107 Indian-based organisations were involved in the study.

The study, which included 72 per cent outsourced contact centres and 28 per cent in-house or captive centres, reported that agent absenteeism, or sick leave in Indian contact centres had reduced on average from 15 days in 2007 to 9 days per annum in 2008. Despite this however, employee tenure remains a critical problem. Length of tenure for agents who have left the contact centre in the

last 12 months is 9 months, and the average length of tenure for all agents in Indian contact centres is 11 months, Malaysia 20 months, Singapore 18 months, Thailand 17 months and China 12 months tenure (for agents who have left their contact centre in the last 12 months).

Interestingly, the smaller Indian contact centres (<100 seats) have lower lengths of agent tenure at about 10 months on average, compared to the larger centres (>100 seats) where tenure is closer to 15 months. This may suggest that the larger centres are recruiting agents from smaller centres, or that they are able to provide greater investment in human resource management, thereby holding onto agents for a longer time.

Other evidence of an increased focus on managing human resources was an increase in the average num-

ber of days training an experienced agent receives. In 2007 an agent who had been with the centre for over 12 months received 11 days training and in 2008 this has increased to 14 days training.

Another interesting result for the Indian industry was that 70 per cent of contact centre agents who left their contact centre job in the last 12 months chose to work in another contact centre job, as opposed to leave the industry altogether. This result is in sharp contrast to countries such as Singapore where 73 per cent of agents chose to leave the industry altogether, with Philippines 53 per cent, Thailand 76 per cent, China 70 per cent and Malaysia 51 per cent of agents who left, leaving the industry altogether.

Dr Catriona Wallace, President of callcentres.net, commented, "for many years the Indian contact cen-

tre industry has been highly criticised for its lack of focus on human resource management, but it now seems there is investment being made in Indian contact centre employees and this is important for India with regard to increasing agent tenure and also attracting on-going off-shored work."

"With such a highly competitive outsourcing market in the region and increasing expectations of customer service at or near Western market levels, organisations need to pay particular interest to the career development and continuity of their agents," said Don Lee, Director of Asia Pacific, Autonomy etalk.

"In addition to formalised career development plans, coaching and training tools found in quality monitoring solutions along with performance analytics can be a tremen-

dous asset in continuing education," he said.

Results reveal that the Asian Contact Centre Industry is in a period of transition from the provision of traditional service and support to being service and sales or revenue generation focused.

The report shows in India 98 per cent of all customer contacts in the country are handled by contact centres. Moreover, the study shows that 67 per cent of contact centres in India recognise the opportunity to up or cross-sell during an inbound call, creating opportunities to generate revenue in addition to revenue generated from outbound calls.

Dr Wallace, commented, "These results show that the Indian contact center industry is keeping pace with international trends towards transitioning from cost of profit centres. The contact centre is fast becoming an

organisation's most valuable revenue-generating asset and the results suggest that the Indian industry is well on this path."

"Leading companies worldwide, including their CEOs, have recognised the power the contact centre has to drive customer loyalty and increase revenue," said Michael McBrien, Senior Vice President, Genesys Asia Pacific.

"To achieve this, companies need to expand their contact centre operations model by better segmenting customers and expanding the agent resource pool to experts to deliver targeted and relevant offers. Companies also need to understand and embrace the Web and next-generation voices self-service — these new technologies are redefining the customer experience and increasing companies' ability to engage with their customers," he said.