



Client

iiNet

Industry

Telecommunications

Country

Australia / South Africa

Challenge

Design, build and operate an advanced, customer-focused contact centre solution to resolve overflow calls for Australia's third largest internet service provider (ISP), providing seamless integration with iiNet's culture, customer satisfaction metrics and performance criteria

Solution

Turnkey outsourced contact centre solution

A partnership of equals

How Merchants' contact centre operational capabilities and iiNet's visionary service ethic deliver awesome customer service

Client Overview

iiNet is the third largest internet service provider in Australia. Competing head to head with major industry players like Optus and Telstra, it uses its unique entrepreneurial flair and intense focus on customer service to stand out from competitors and win market share. iiNet's service philosophy is intrinsic to its business. It places great importance on customer interactions and demands high levels of technical call resolution ability and skills from its agents. This is measured through the use of Net Promoter Scores®. Simply put, this is a brief, real-time three question feedback and response generator that measures agent performance and the success of the interaction, by asking three simple questions:

1. How satisfied were you with the service you received on the call?
2. How satisfied were you with the outcome of the call?
3. Would you recommend iiNet to other users?

The scores generated from the questions provide almost immediate feedback on agent performance and provides a high correlation between the level of agent performance and customer satisfaction with the iiNet brand. Because of this, the NPS score drives a disciplined approach to every client interaction. Feedback from each call score is used to stay in touch with the customer base, their service experience and needs, and respond proactively to close any customer experience gaps.

Business Overview

iiNet already ran successful contact centres in Australia and New Zealand, but wanted to implement a follow the sun strategy. iiNet began researching the viability of taking a contact centre offshore and creating a state of the art, advanced contact centre facility in a time zone where it could roll out its follow the sun strategy and relieve the burden on local staff of having to work unsociable shifts that took them away from their families and affected their quality of life. The challenge for all the parties involved would be translating iiNet's unique, customer-centric service approach to a partner where it would not only be understood, but embraced and lived through every interaction, on every call. The project would need to recreate the focus, performance and energy of the existing iiNet contact centres, in a new location many thousands of kilometers away in another time zone. The brief was to create an outsourced facility that was, quite simply, an extension of iiNet's business in every single detail. This project would be the first Australian project outsourced to South Africa and had the potential to create a number of opportunities for both parties.

Solution Provided

A group of senior management executives from iiNet came to South Africa on an investigative trip and, based on their assessment of the location and the range of skills and infrastructure available, made the decision to establish an offshore contact centre. Merchants and iiNet formed a strong positive relationship from the outset. There was a strong cultural fit and the levels of transparency and honest discussion regarding the

Results

- ▲ Merchants was able to fully replicate the spirit, flair and service ethic of iiNet's existing call centres, creating a fully functional outpost of the iiNet brand over 5,000 kms away from headquarters
- ▲ Merchants provided a complete end-to-end solution, procuring all elements of the facility from connectivity to human resources
- ▲ Operational cost savings of approximately 20% were delivered
- ▲ The contact centre is able to leverage the six hour time zone difference to advantage, allowing iiNet to offer end-to-end service coverage while allowing its on-shore agents to work sociable hours
- ▲ Achieved fantastic NPS scores, in line with iiNet's onshore performance scores
- ▲ Worked with iiNet to share our experiences and together find ways to enhance service, such as the implementation of the Learning Bank
- ▲ De-risk the offshore move by providing local expertise

potential challenges and limitations of working in a merged first and third world economy, were established at the outset. This initial openness and candor laid the foundation for what became a highly interactive and collaborative partnership between Merchants and iiNet. In fact, by the time the iiNet management team concluded its fact finding tour, Merchants had been confirmed as the partner of choice and we were ready to commence with the project. iiNet contracted Merchants to implement the full design and build of the contact centre with a 12 month operational term. The intent was to follow Merchants' design, build, operate, transfer (DBOT) solution which would leverage Merchants expertise in designing, building and operating the local contact centre and providing iiNet with a risk mitigation strategy of transferring the operation back to iiNet if iiNet felt that there was reason to do so.

How We Delivered

Merchants had extremely tight deadlines in which to deliver a technology and resource-intensive solution. The timeline specified four months to build the contact centre, and 12 months to operate. To maximise the build time, we undertook intensive recruitment, profiling and training while the location was sourced and then equipped with the technology infrastructure and prepared for the team. The Net Promoter Customer service targets were unrelenting (set at 35%), and required a high level of training. Combined with the opportunity to develop skills and competencies and be exposed to iiNet's best in class approach to customer experience as well as incentivisation schemes available to them, working within iiNet's extended family proved to have a positive impact on delivering excellent staff retention and satisfaction rates. Training was rolled out using a hybrid model that was based on established iiNet material, then modified to suit local conditions and culture. Merchants uses a 'coached environment' where trainee agents are mentored till proficiency is achieved. The initial training takes place over six weeks. Agents spend at least two weeks in the Learning Academy however; this is dependent on the individual's ability to meet service targets and metrics. The Learning Academy has a support ratio of one Customer Service Manager to four agents to help accelerate upskilling and learning. Once the agents have succeeded in this learning environment, they go on to the floor to work as part of a team of 12. Each team of 12 has its own dedicated Customer Service Manager. Agents have to consistently prove themselves on the job for three months before being eligible to transitioning from a flexible employee contract to fixed term contracts.

Underperforming agents are mentored and allowed the opportunity to rectify their areas of weakness through focused development in the Development Academy. This is a far more supportive environment and invariably results in these agents achieving the necessary targets.

The new Cape Town facility soon generated a unique energy born out of iiNet's complete focus on client satisfaction and client feedback. Our agents field a wide range of complex and technically challenging calls, including tech support, billing and sales. iiNet customers generally have a high level of technology literacy - they are a discerning customer base to service. In addition to keeping these customers happy, the Merchants agents have been praised for their warm and patient approach to less knowledgeable callers, which has added another element to iiNet's customer service experience. Although the physical logistics on the project were exceptionally complex, Merchants achieved outstanding project delivery and there were no major delays or problems leading up to the 'go live' date.