

bwin places its bets with Merchants South Africa.

Johannesburg, South Africa, 4 April 2007 - bwin, one of the world's leading online gambling networks, has awarded Merchants, a Dimension Data Group company, a R40m outsourced contact centre contract.

The 24-month outsourcing agreement extends an existing 12-month contract, which saw Merchants design, build and operate bwin's worldwide customer contact centre.

As part of the initial agreement, Merchants was to transfer management of the operations to bwin earlier this year following the conclusion of the 12-month contract.

However, Merchants will now continue to manage and run the call centre for the duration of the new contract, based on the success of the original phase of the contact centre's rollout and management.

"We decided to keep the existing relationship with Merchants because we saw the benefits of the company's best practices in managing our contact centre," says Carl Klingberg, Managing Director of bwin Games AB, the poker and casino arm of bwin Interactive Entertainment AG.

The 50-seat contact centre, based in Cape Town, provides customer service and support for online player's queries from around the world, with most of the players residing in Europe, Canada and UK. The contact centre operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"The majority of customer support deals with queries on the rules and methods of depositing and cashing out money, information on the types of games available and their rules, as well as technical queries," said Chris Klapf, general manager for bwin operations at Merchants SA.

The contract is a contact centre first for Merchants as it involves 'Triple Play' customer service functionality – making it one of the most advanced contact centre operations in South Africa.

'Triple Play' signifies that the contact centre agents handle players' queries through three communication channels – voice, e-mail and instant chat – with the e-mail channel making up 50% and the voice and chat channels about 25% of all player interaction.

The 'Triple Play' customer service functionality is in keeping with the results of the 2007 Merchants global contact centre benchmarking report indicating a move by organisations towards developing multiple channels for customer interaction.

While voice remains the largest channel with 78% of interaction, the report shows significant growth in the use of e-mail, SMS, web/instant chat and interactive voice technology (IVR).

Merchants partnered with Dimension Data and Internet Solutions in order to provide bwin with the technology solutions needed to implement the 'Triple Play' strategy.

The expansion of bwin's customer service capabilities is a result of the fact that online gambling is growing at a fast pace, despite it becoming a heavily regulated industry in markets such as the United States.

"The online gambling boom has been phenomenal, and all trends point to further growth," says Klappf. "Online gambling revenues worldwide have grown from \$82,7m in 2001 to \$2,4bn in 2005; last year more than \$60bn was spent on gambling sites; and every day 1,8m players toss their ante into the virtual pots of the Internet," he adds.

Within the agreement, Merchants supports bwin with new strategic initiatives such as welcome and retention calls, business intelligence, differentiated service models, player statistics and reporting.

"The South African contact centre handles all first line support for customer queries," says Klappf. "Should the agent not be able to resolve a query, it will be escalated to a team leader, who will then either resolve the query or escalate to a third tier of customer support in our headquarters in Sweden."

Vanda Dickson, Head of Marketing and Strategy for Merchants SA, believes that international clients like bwin are increasingly choosing South Africa to outsource their contact centres to - particularly for complex customer service interactions that require a high degree of English fluency and the ability to build rapport with customers.

"Companies are outsourcing to South Africa because we offer competitive costs and long term cost stability; culturally aligned, skilled, agents with clear English; and a high quality communications and technology infrastructure," she concludes.

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