Your friendly guide to profitable call center management

The call center industry is one of the world’s most rapidly growing and fastest changing. For call center managers or anyone who just wants the inside scoop on this exciting field, this guide is a must-read. Loaded with best practices from the most successful call centers around the world, *Call Centers For Dummies* covers everything you need to know, whether you’re just setting up shop or looking to improve your operations.

- **Start from the ground up** — investigate where to locate and how to build a call center, understand the roles and responsibilities in a call center team, and consider the outsourcing option
- **Call center business basics** — create a successful call center business model, determine achievable goals, and measure your center’s progress through business drivers
- **Ensure proper resource management** — discover how to always have the right staff levels — including home agents — through forecasting and scheduling
- **Gain efficiency through technology** — see how advances in call center technology, such as interactive voice response and Voice over Internet Protocol, can help your call center agents be more productive
- **Build high-performance teams** — recruit and retain the best people by providing great training and keeping your agents motivated
- **Keep improving** — explore strategies to identify areas of improvement and learn how to manage change within your call center

Open the book and find:

- How to develop a positive company culture and high employee engagement
- Strategies to improve your customer satisfaction scores and first-call resolution
- Tips for designing the ideal space for your center
- How to select the right outsourcing partner
- How to create people-friendly work schedules
- How to set up a home agent program
- Ways to decrease costs and increase efficiency

Réal Bergevin is executive vice president of Transcom Worldwide. Afshan Kinder, Winston Siegel, and Bruce Simpson are partners in SwitchGear Consulting, a company specializing in call centers and change management. SwitchGear’s clients include companies such as Scotiabank, TELUS, and Ceridian.

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Réal Bergevin is executive vice president of Transcom Worldwide. In 1991, he founded a call center consulting business that he and his wife, Anne, expanded into NuComm International, a global outsourcing call center service provider. NuComm was listed in Deloitte & Touche’s Canada’s 50 Best Managed Companies for five consecutive years and, in 2005, was awarded the National Quality Institute’s Canadian Award of Excellence. NuComm was sold to Transcom in 2007.

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He is the author of industry white papers including “The ROI of Coaching” and “How to Control Payroll Leakage,” published by Frost & Sullivan.
Dedication

This book is dedicated to the unsung heroes inside every call center. From front-line agents to team leaders and managers, you inspire us — and you inspired this book.

Authors’ Acknowledgments

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We’re proud of this book; please send us your comments at http://dummies.custhelp.com. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

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Contents at a Glance

Introduction ................................................................ 1

Part I: From the Ground Up: An Overview of the Call Center ........................................................ 7
Chapter 1: A First Look at Call Centers .......................................................... 9
Chapter 2: Business Basics: Models and Drivers and Goals, Oh My! .................. 19
Chapter 3: Developing the Cast of Characters ............................................... 43
Chapter 4: Building a Call Center of Your Own ......................................... 65
Chapter 5: Choosing the Outsourcing Option .............................................. 85

Part II: The Master Plan: Finance, Analysis, and Resource Management ................ 107
Chapter 6: Analyze This! ............................................................................. 109
Chapter 7: Right People, Right Place, Right Time: Resource Management .... 143
Chapter 8: Call Center Scheduling: Not As Simple As 1, 2, 3 ....................... 157

Part III: Making Life Better with Technology ........................................... 185
Chapter 9: An Introduction to Call Center Technology ............................ 187
Chapter 10: Technological Enhancements: Getting the Newest and Coolest Stuff ......................................................................................................... 209
Chapter 11: Using Home Agents ............................................................... 221

Part IV: Creating High-Performance Teams .............................................. 241
Chapter 12: Hiring and Training ................................................................. 243
Chapter 13: Creating a Coaching Culture .................................................. 257
Chapter 14: Creating a Motivated Workforce ........................................... 265

Part V: Ensuring Continuous Improvement ............................................ 281
Chapter 15: The Power of Process Improvement ........................................ 283
Chapter 16: Mastering Change in Your Organization .................................... 299
Chapter 17: Quality-Control Programs and Certifications ......................... 313
Part VI: The Part of Tens ....................................................... 321
Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Improve Agents’ Job Satisfaction .................. 323
Chapter 19: Ten Questions Every Call Center Manager Should Answer ........ 329
Chapter 20: Almost Ten Ways to Decrease Call Center Costs and Increase Efficiency ................................................................................. 335

Appendix A: Key Call Center Definitions and Concepts .......................... 341

Appendix B: Call Center Support Services .................................... 349

Index ............................................................................................. 353
Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
  About This Book ................................................................................................. 1
  Foolish Assumptions ........................................................................................... 2
  How This Book Is Organized .............................................................................. 3
    Part I: From the Ground Up: An Overview of the Call Center ............ 3
    Part II: The Master Plan: Finance, Analysis, and Resource
      Management ............................................................................................... 3
    Part III: Making Life Better with Technology .................................. 3
    Part IV: Creating High-Performance Teams .................................. 4
    Part V: Ensuring Continuous Improvement ..................................... 4
    Part VI: The Part of Tens ....................................................................... 4
  Appendices ........................................................................................................... 4
  Icons Used in This Book ................................................................................... 4
  Where to Go from Here .................................................................................... 5

Part I: From the Ground Up: An Overview of the Call Center ....................... 7

Chapter 1: A First Look at Call Centers ............................................................. 9
  Defining Call Centers ......................................................................................... 9
  Inbound, outbound, or blended .................................................................. 10
  Contact or call center: What’s in a name? .............................................. 10
  Tripping Down Memory Lane: The Evolution of the Call Center .......... 11
    Moving from low-tech to high-tech ........................................................... 12
    Moving from cost center to profit center .................................................... 12
    Meeting legal and image challenges ......................................................... 12
    Today’s call centers: Ringing up big numbers ...................................... 13
  Making Call Centers Work ............................................................................ 14
    Identifying good call center managers ................................................... 14
    Defining the culture ..................................................................................... 14
  Understanding What Makes Call Centers Good or Bad .......................... 15
    Characteristics of a good call center ....................................................... 16
    Characteristics of a poor call center .......................................................... 17

Chapter 2: Business Basics: Models and Drivers and Goals, Oh My! .......... 19
  Creating a Call Center Business Model ....................................................... 20
  Developing your mission ............................................................................. 22
  Dissecting a typical call center mission ..................................................... 23
Determining Your Business Goals ............................................................... 24
Defining a good objective ........................................................................ 26
Avoiding misleading measures ................................................................. 26
Considering service level ..................................................................... 27
Flowing goals through the accountability funnel ................................... 28
Measuring Progress with Performance Drivers ....................................... 29
Categorizing the drivers .................................................................... 31
Balancing the drivers .......................................................................... 34
Carrying Out Call Center Best Practices ............................................... 36
Focusing on people ............................................................................ 37
Focusing on process ........................................................................... 38
Focusing on technology ...................................................................... 40
Reporting: Providing Feedback.............................................................. 41

Chapter 3: Developing the Cast of Characters ................................. 43
Designing an Organizational Chart .......................................................... 44
Key considerations .............................................................................. 44
Key tasks ............................................................................................... 45
Introducing the Call Center Team:
Roles and Responsibilities .................................................................. 46
Senior management ............................................................................. 46
Call center manager ........................................................................... 48
Agent performance team .................................................................... 49
Scheduler .............................................................................................. 52
Analysts ................................................................................................. 53
Compliance and procedures officer .................................................... 55
Call center agent .................................................................................. 55
Finding the Best People for Your Jobs .................................................. 56
Locating a call center manager .............................................................. 56
Picking an agent performance team: Recruiter, trainer, and team leader ............................................................................... 56
Hiring a scheduler ................................................................................ 57
Acquiring analysts ............................................................................... 58
Rounding up a compliance and procedures officer ............................... 58
Recruiting agents ................................................................................ 59
Creating and Managing Call Center Culture ........................................ 59
Sizing the Organization ......................................................................... 60
Ensuring the best management span .................................................... 61
Planning for growth ............................................................................. 63

Chapter 4: Building a Call Center of Your Own .............................. 65
First Things First: Asking Questions ..................................................... 65
What are the call center’s business goals? ............................................ 66
What functions will the call center perform? ........................................ 66
What support services will the call center require? ............................. 67
What skills do you need on your planning team? ................................. 68
Table of Contents

How big will the call center be? .........................................................68
Will the call center stand alone, or do you plan to network it? .....68
X Marks the Spot: Situating Your Call Center ...............................69
  Considering infrastructure ..........................................................70
  Considering the available workforce ............................................70
Locating near other facilities in the corporation ...........................71
Getting close to your customers ....................................................71
Being far, far away from your customers ......................................72
Going big-city versus rural .........................................................73
Setting Up Shop ..................................................................................74
  Beyond bricks and mortar: Planning the facilities ....................74
  Designing the ideal space .............................................................76
  Understanding environmental issues ..........................................76
  Taking special needs into account .............................................77
Building a Call Center One Step at a Time ....................................77
  Creating the plan ........................................................................79
  Managing the project ..................................................................80
Planning for Problems .....................................................................80
  Multiple locations .....................................................................81
  Stand-alone call centers ..........................................................81
  Networked call centers ............................................................82

Chapter 5: Choosing the Outsourcing Option ..............................85
  Understanding the Benefits and Risks of Outsourcing ...............86
  Potential benefits ........................................................................86
  Potential risks ............................................................................87
  Deciding Whether to Outsource ..................................................88
  Clarifying your internal costs .....................................................88
  Adding hidden costs to your outsourcer’s cost .........................91
Planning the Transition ..................................................................101
  Elements of a typical transition plan .......................................101
  Roles and resources required ....................................................102
Developing a Strong Relationship with Your Outsourcer ...........102
  Setting expectations and creating operating guidelines ..........103
  Verifying the outsourcer’s understanding .................................103
  Staying involved .......................................................................104
  Knowing when to jump in .........................................................105
Part II: The Master Plan: Finance, Analysis, and Resource Management

Chapter 6: Analyze This!

Adding It Up: Call Center Math
- Understanding the fundamental concepts
- Using models in calculations

Analyzing Business Goals
- Breaking down the operating budget
- Measuring cost per contact
- Measuring cost per customer
- Measuring cost per resolution
- Ringing up revenue
- Scoring satisfaction

Analyzing Business Goals
- Measuring cost per contact
- Measuring cost per customer
- Measuring cost per resolution
- Ringing up revenue
- Scoring satisfaction

Performance Drivers: Managing the Results
- Cost per agent hour
- Call length
- Contacts per customer
- Occupancy
- Conversion per contact
- Dollar value per conversion
- Accessibility
- Agent professionalism and ability
- Company and call center policies and procedures

Setting Performance Targets
- Targets for accessibility/service level
- Targets for call length
- Targets for occupancy

Chapter 7: Right People, Right Place, Right Time: Resource Management

Understanding Resource Management Tasks and Concepts
- Forecasting
- Scheduling
- Full-time equivalent
- Real-time management of resources

Forecasting: Timing Is Everything
- Long term: Setting budget and capital projections
- Midterm: Creating the schedules
- Short term: Making adjustments
- Tracking forecast accuracy

Using the Tools of the Scheduling Trade
- Calculating with Erlang C
- Planning with spreadsheets
- Using workforce management software
Table of Contents

Scheduling the Work That Your Call Center Needs to Do ...................... 148
  Starting long: The first step in forecasting call volume ................ 150
  Breaking the forecast into intervals ............................................. 150
  Forecasting call length ................................................................ 154
  Accounting for unique situations .............................................. 154

Chapter 8: Call Center Scheduling: Not As Simple As 1, 2, 3 . . . . . . . 157
  Calculating the Resources Required to Do the Job ....................... 157
  Considering occupancy .............................................................. 158
  Calculating expected occupancy ................................................ 159
  Calculating expected occupancy versus optimal occupancy ...... 160
  Affecting occupancy ............................................................... 163
  Give ’em a break: Accounting for off-phone time ..................... 165

Determining When the Resources Are Required ................................ 168
  Calculating base staff requirements by half-hour intervals ......... 168
  Adding in the off-phone requirements ...................................... 171
  Using your forecast to determine call center size ..................... 174

Scheduling Available Resources to Meet Caller Demand ................. 174
  Starting to build your schedules with full-time shifts ............ 174
  Filling in the gaps with part-time shifts .................................... 177
  Creating a summary of schedules ............................................. 178
  Creating weekly schedules ...................................................... 178

Creating People-Friendly Schedules .............................................. 179
  Letting agents bid for shifts .................................................... 179
  Offering flextime ....................................................................... 180

Accounting for Unique Situations .................................................. 181
  Scheduling for different types of work .................................... 181
  Making contingency plans ....................................................... 182
  Scheduling for multiple-site call centers ................................. 184

Part III: Making Life Better with Technology ....................... 185

Chapter 9: An Introduction to Call Center Technology ............... 187
  Seeing What Technology Does for Call Centers ......................... 187
  Using Telecommunications Technology in the Call Center ....... 189
    Automatic number identification .......................................... 189
    Dialed number identification service ................................... 190
    Dynamic network routing .................................................... 190
    Automatic call distributor ................................................ 191
    Predictive dialing ................................................................ 194
    Interactive voice response .................................................. 196
    Voice over Internet Protocol .............................................. 198
  Hosted call center applications ............................................ 200
  Web tools .................................................................................. 201
Getting Information to Agents ................................................................. 202
  Giving agents the tools they need ...................................................... 202
  Providing specialized call center applications ................................ 203
  Connecting agents to the local area network ................................. 204
Generating Reports ................................................................................. 205
  Using multiple systems to generate reports .................................... 206
  Pulling the data together ................................................................. 206

Chapter 10: Technological Enhancements: Getting the Newest and Coolest Stuff ................................................................. 209
  Integrating Phones and Computers ........................................................ 209
    Screen pops .................................................................................. 210
    Mandatory data entry ................................................................  210
    Soft-phone functionality .............................................................. 210
    Enhanced reporting .................................................................. 211
    Idle-time training ...................................................................... 211
    Coordinated screen transfer ....................................................... 211
    Call routing ............................................................................... 211
    Dynamic scripting ................................................................... 212
    Call blending ............................................................................ 212
    Web-enabled call centers ............................................................. 212
  Warehousing Data to Track Agent Performance ........................................ 212
  Monitoring Quality ......................................................................... 213
  Using Customer Relationship Management Technology ..................... 214
    Putting CRM to work ................................................................. 215
    Developing a CRM strategy ......................................................... 216
  Employing a Knowledge Base ............................................................ 216
  Surveying Customer Satisfaction ...................................................... 217
  Getting Approval for Technology ....................................................... 218

Chapter 11: Using Home Agents .............................................................. 221
  Seeing Reasons for a Home Agent Program .......................................... 222
    Making your business run more efficiently .................................... 222
    Providing an attractive work option for your agents ..................... 225
  Deciding Whether a Home Agent Program Is Right for You .................. 226
  Figuring Out the Technology ............................................................ 227
    Deciding where to host the network ............................................. 227
    Setting up a network in-house ..................................................... 228
  Implementing the Program ................................................................. 231
    Creating an operating plan ......................................................... 231
    Planning the work .................................................................... 232
    Building a management team .................................................... 232
    Explaining the program to your staff ......................................... 233
    Selecting and/or recruiting agents ............................................. 234
    Setting up the agents at home .................................................... 235
## Table of Contents

Integrating Best Practices into the Program ............................................ 235
  Delivering uniform customer service .................................................. 236
  Aligning the workforce and quality teams ........................................... 237
Helping Agents Deal with In-House and At-Home Differences .......... 238
  Training ............................................................................................... 238
  Isolation ............................................................................................. 238

**Part IV: Creating High-Performance Teams............... 241**

**Chapter 12: Hiring and Training .......................................................... 243**
  Recognizing the Key Components of Optimal Performance .......... 243
  Managing Employee Performance in Five Simple Steps ............... 244
  Recruiting the Right People ............................................................... 245
    Evaluating skill ................................................................................ 245
    Evaluating motivation .................................................................... 248
  Setting Agent Expectations ............................................................... 250
    Setting performance goals ............................................................ 250
    Establishing bonuses .................................................................... 250
    Doing the math on agent performance ....................................... 251
    Balancing your expectations ....................................................... 251
    Giving specific directions ........................................................... 252
  Providing Appropriate Training ......................................................... 253
    Keeping the training simple ......................................................... 253
    Covering the basics ....................................................................... 254
    Keeping the training short ........................................................... 255
    Encouraging continued training ................................................. 255

**Chapter 13: Creating a Coaching Culture ......................................... 257**
  Seeing the Benefits of Coaching ......................................................... 258
    Financial benefits .......................................................................... 258
    Performance benefits .................................................................... 258
  Understanding the Principles of Coaching ...................................... 260
    Get the coach on the court ............................................................ 260
    Prioritize ruthlessly ................................................................. 260
    Distinguish among management, leadership, and coaching ......... 261
    Ask, don’t tell ............................................................................... 261
    Put energy before value .............................................................. 261
    Build on strengths ................................................................. 261
    Focus on one skill and one step at a time .................................... 262
    Be specific ................................................................................. 262
    Follow up .................................................................................... 262
    Practice consistency, repeatability, and results ......................... 263
  Coaching the Coaches ................................................................. 263
Chapter 14: Creating a Motivated Workforce .............................. 265
  Knowing What Motivating Your Employees Involves .................. 265
  Seeing the benefits of motivating agents .................................. 267
  Identifying why agents leave .................................................. 267
  Figuring Out What Motivates Your Agents ................................. 268
  Understanding what agents want ............................................. 268
  Surveying your agents ............................................................ 269
  Comparing your call center with others .................................... 270
  Motivating Your Agents .......................................................... 271
  Making agents feel valued ...................................................... 271
  Taking time to recognize agents ............................................. 272
  Paying agents appropriately ................................................. 274
  Offering incentive and bonus programs .................................. 275
  Developing agents’ careers .................................................... 278

Part V: Ensuring Continuous Improvement ....................... 281

Chapter 15: The Power of Process Improvement ....................... 283
  Managing Complexity through Process Improvement ................. 283
  Considering complexity in call centers ................................... 284
  Benefiting from process improvement ..................................... 285
  Developing a Culture of Improvement ...................................... 286
  Seeing your company through the customer’s eyes .................... 286
  Checking the internal view ..................................................... 287
  Mapping your processes ........................................................ 288
  Involving the team .................................................................. 289
  Doing a root-cause analysis ................................................... 291
  Documenting policies and procedures ..................................... 292
  Staying Informed: Legislative Considerations ............................ 293
  Law and order: Creating appropriate policies ........................... 293
  Knowing the laws .................................................................... 294

Chapter 16: Mastering Change in Your Organization ................. 299
  Recognizing When Change Leadership Is Needed ...................... 299
  Understanding common changes in call centers ....................... 300
  Knowing how people react to change ..................................... 301
  Seeing why things go wrong sometimes ................................. 302
  Improving Your Personal Change-Leadership Style ................... 303
  Avoiding change pitfalls ....................................................... 303
  Following the Rule of Change Success ..................................... 304
# Table of Contents

Reducing Resistance to Change ................................................................. 305  
Earn — and keep — agents’ trust ............................................................... 305  
Communicate well .................................................................................... 306  
Show empathy ........................................................................................... 309  
Identify and work with influential agents .............................................. 310  
Involve the team ......................................................................................... 311  
Launch a pilot program ........................................................................... 311  

**Chapter 17: Quality-Control Programs and Certifications .......... 313**  
Certifying Your Management Team .......................................................... 313  
In-house versus external programs ......................................................... 314  
A course is a course, of course, of course ............................................ 314  
Who should attend management certification courses? ................. 316  
Instituting a Quality-Control Program .................................................... 316  
ISO 9001/2000 .......................................................................................... 317  
COPC-2000 ............................................................................................... 318  
Six Sigma .................................................................................................... 318  
Finding Other Sources of Help ................................................................. 319  
Consulting firms ....................................................................................... 319  
Trade shows ............................................................................................... 320  
Trade magazines ....................................................................................... 320  

**Part VI: The Part of Tens .................................................. 321**  

**Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Improve Agents’ Job Satisfaction ....... 323**  
Recruit People Who Value the Work ....................................................... 323  
Clarify Expectations .................................................................................... 324  
Provide Thorough Job-Specific Training ................................................. 324  
Ask, Don’t Tell ............................................................................................. 325  
Remove Roadblocks to Success .............................................................. 325  
Calm Fears .................................................................................................... 325  
Don’t Ask Agents to Do Anything You Wouldn’t Want to Do ............... 326  
Communicate Honestly ............................................................................... 326  
Ask for Feedback ......................................................................................... 327  
Be Positive .................................................................................................... 327  

**Chapter 19: Ten Questions Every Call Center Manager Should Answer .......... 329**  
How Does Your Call Center Fit into the Bigger Company Picture? ....... 329  
Why Are People Calling You? ................................................................. 330  
What’s Your Ideal Service-Level Objective? ........................................... 330  
What Does It Cost to Run Your Call Center for One Hour? .............. 331  
Are Your Employees Happy? ................................................................. 331
What Will the Call Center Look Like in 12 to 18 Months? ....................... 332
What Legislation Affects Your Call Center? ............................................. 332
How Does Technology Affect Your Call Center? ..................................... 333
What’s Your Disaster Recovery Plan? ....................................................... 334
What Are Your Three Initiatives for Improvement? .............................. 334

Chapter 20: Almost Ten Ways to Decrease Call Center
Costs and Increase Efficiency ................................................................. 335

Improve Call Control ............................................................................ 335
Map and Improve Call Processes ......................................................... 336
Achieve Your Service-Level Objective ................................................ 336
Make Your Call Center Bigger ............................................................... 337
Use Skills-Based Routing ...................................................................... 337
Turn Idle Time into Training Time ......................................................... 338
Eliminate Unnecessary Calls ................................................................. 338
Find Out What a Change in Agent Utilization Costs ........................... 339
Relocate Your Call Center .................................................................... 340

Appendix A: Key Call Center Definitions
and Concepts .......................................................................................... 341

Appendix B: Call Center Support Services ......................................... 349

Employee Testing and Evaluation ......................................................... 349
Management Certification ..................................................................... 350
ISO Registration ..................................................................................... 350
Call Center Consulting .......................................................................... 351

Index ....................................................................................................... 353
Welcome to Call Centers For Dummies, 2nd Edition. If the topic of call centers has piqued your interest, and you’re looking for a road map that can help you lead and manage a call center, you’ve come to the right place. The purpose of this book is to demystify call centers, explaining clearly what they do and how they do it, all in a simple, straightforward manner. We hope that you’ll have a little fun along the way, too!

In the first edition, Réal Bergevin clearly laid out his approach to call center management and did an excellent job of covering a wide range of related topics. So why did we write a second edition? Well, call centers have changed significantly because of the advancements in technology and the growing influence of the Internet. A new challenge now exists because customers have many ways to communicate with the call center. In addition to the good ol’ phone, customers can use e-mail, online chat, or text messaging to express their feelings or ask questions about products or services.

In addition, many agents can work from home now, so you need to be able to communicate with those home agents effectively. You also have to find innovative ways to lead, motivate, and coach people remotely.

With change coming at a fast and furious pace, how are you going to provide consistently exceptional service to your customers? You can conquer this seemingly difficult task by sticking to the fundamentals, which we cover in this book. This book draws on the experience and insight of four people (us!), but we all lead our businesses by using the same people-first philosophy.

We can’t think of a better vehicle for sharing our knowledge, vision, and philosophy for leading and managing call centers than this book. We hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

About This Book

Many people have developed some pretty strong opinions about call centers. Executives and analysts alike realize more than ever that call centers can have a tremendous impact on a company’s revenue, costs, market intelligence, and customer loyalty. Call centers have become a significant part of local and world economies.
A well-run call center doesn’t happen by accident or chance. It happens only if the leader of the center has a clear vision of what can be achieved and creates an environment where high-performing teams can flourish. This book can help because it’s full of best practices for leading people and managing process and technology.

Because of the complexity of operating a business in today’s world, many call center professionals have come to us to deepen their understanding of how changes in business affect call center operations. We hope that you benefit not only from this book’s collection of best practices, but also from the depth of knowledge that we’ve gathered through our combined half century of experience. The difference between this book and the variety of call center publications, seminars, and Web sites out there is that this book doesn’t offer a call center “theory of everything.” We share with you concepts and practices that have worked for us in our operations. We know that managers benefit from their mistakes as much as they do from their successes, and through these pages, you get the advantage of seeing what to do as well as what not to do.

**Foolish Assumptions**

If you work in the call center industry, this book gives you an easy-to-use and (we hope) easy-to-read reference guide to the effective operation of a call center. We make some assumptions about who you are and what you may be looking for in this book:

✔ You’re a hotshot MBA tracking through your career, and you find yourself running a call center.

✔ You’re an experienced call center manager, and you’re looking for some new ideas and perspectives.

✔ You supply the call center industry and want to better understand your clients’ management perspective.

✔ You work in marketing, finance, or human resources, so you have some contact with a call center and wonder what goes on in it.

✔ You’re considering a career in call centers.

✔ You’re working in a call center and want to advance your career by unlocking the mysterious, ancient call center secrets.

✔ You’re looking for new material with which you can dazzle members of the opposite sex. (Okay, we don’t make any promises about this one.)
How This Book Is Organized

Call Centers For Dummies, 2nd Edition is organized in six parts (plus two appendixes), each covering a different aspect of the call center. Chapters within each part cover specific topics in detail. Each part contains concepts and definitions, interesting facts and anecdotes, and (in most cases) practical how-to suggestions pertaining to the topic. You can take any approach to tackling this book. Unless you’re a seasoned call center pro, however, you’ll probably get the most out of this book by starting with Part I.

Part I: From the Ground Up: An Overview of the Call Center

This part provides a good overview of many of the topics covered in more detail in later parts. Consider it to be a call center primer, with a little bit extra. If you’re just getting started or want a brief indoctrination in all things call center, you may find this part to be especially useful.

In this part, we also discuss planning a new call center and considering outsourcing, and we introduce a business model for building a call center and relate that model to the larger corporate mission and goals.

Part II: The Master Plan: Finance, Analysis, and Resource Management

This part looks at call center analysis, financial planning, and staffing. We provide a simple overview of how (and what) measures come together to drive a call center’s operational and financial performance.

Also in this part, we uncover some of the mysteries of how and why call centers perform the way they do, and we explore everything from forecasting to schedule creation and workforce management automation.

Part III: Making Life Better with Technology

Part III reviews call center technologies, including basic requirements, valuable enhancements, and home agent programs. We also cover a simple
approach to recommending and justifying new technology, and we show you what this technology can do for your customers, your agents, and your call center.

**Part IV: Creating High-Performance Teams**

In this part, we cover recruiting; establishing job expectations; offering training, feedback, and support; and creating employee engagement. We also show you how to implement a simple five-step process that can guide the way you manage agents’ performance.

**Part V: Ensuring Continuous Improvement**

In Part V, we explore the call center process and how to manage and improve it. In addition, we examine policies, procedures, and the effects of legislation and employment law on call centers. We also give you the scoop on mastering change, as well as details on various quality programs and certifications for call centers.

**Part VI: The Part of Tens**

In this part (a *For Dummies* classic), we offer tips and techniques that we’ve collected from the call center industry. These quick hits can give a boost to your company’s revenue and efficiency, employee morale, and customer satisfaction. Even if you don’t read the rest of this book, check out this part!

**Appendixes**

Many industries use a language all their own, and the call center industry is no exception, so Appendix A provides a glossary of key call center concepts. Appendix B gives you access to support services such as call center associations, technology suppliers, and consultants.

**Icons Used in This Book**

We’ve placed several icons throughout this book to point out certain information, and these icons have the following meanings.
Material marked with the Tip icon provides a general recommendation about how you can improve your call center or run it more easily.

This icon flags any potential pitfalls that you may want to be careful to avoid.

This content is — you guessed it — the stuff we don’t want you to forget.

This icon designates information that you probably don’t need to know but may find interesting.

This icon points out real-world stories that we’ve experienced or that someone told us.

**Where to Go from Here**

We certainly invite you to curl up on a Saturday night with a nice cup of tea, hot chocolate, or whatever and read this book from cover to cover. We’re sure that you hard-core call center types will find it quite gripping — a real page-turner.

We suspect, however, that some of you may not have the desire or need to read this entire book straight through. We encourage you to find the part that interests you most and start there.
Part I

From the Ground Up: An Overview of the Call Center

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant

MOUSE PAD HELP CENTER

It sounds like you may still have your pad in the packaging, sir.

No ma’am, the pad goes on the desktop, not the floor.

Try turning the pad over...

Anyone have any experience with a round pad?!
In this part . . .

We answer the question “What is a call center?” and explore what makes a good (or bad) call center. If you just want to know how call centers work, are thinking about working in one, or have ever had any aspirations to start a call center of your own, this is the part for you.

In this part, we introduce a business model for building a call center and relate that model to the larger corporate mission and goals. We examine the organizational structure, exploring the roles you need to fill to ensure that the center performs according to its business model and goals. We also discuss the logistics of building a call center and some key factors to consider if you’re thinking about outsourcing your call center.
Chapter 1

A First Look at Call Centers

In This Chapter

▶ Understanding what call centers are
▶ Following the evolution of call centers
▶ Knowing how call centers operate
▶ Differentiating the good and bad aspects of the industry

For years, Réal’s mom has been asking him, “What is it you do, again?” Well, here it is, Mom: He works in a call center. In fact, he works in a lot of call centers. Okay, okay — you don’t know what a call center is. Well, this chapter explains it all.

Defining Call Centers

Here’s a basic definition of a call center: When you call, say, an airline, cable-television company, or bank, the person you deal with at the other end of the phone is a call center agent (or perhaps representative, consultant, or associate), and the office or department that this person works in is a call center. Sometimes, a call center consists of just one or two people sitting beside a phone, answering customer calls. Often, it’s a very large room that has a lot of people neatly organized in rows, sitting beside their phones, answering customer calls. To the customer, the call center is the voice of the company. If you’re angry, you often get mad at the person at the other end of the phone. After all, you’re talking to the company, right?

To the company, the call center is many things: cost center, profit center, key source of revenue, key source of frustration, strategic weapon, strategic disadvantage, source of marketing research, and source of marketing paralysis. The role of the call center varies from company to company, depending on how closely the call center works with the parent or client organization to support the company’s goals and the ability of the call center itself.
Inbound, outbound, or blended

Call centers communicate with their customers in several ways, depending on the type of call center. Call centers fall into three main categories:

✓ **Inbound:** In an *inbound* call center, customers initiate the calls. Customers may make these calls to buy airline tickets, to get technical assistance with their personal computers, to get answers to questions about their utility bills, to get emergency assistance when their cars won’t start, to get advice from a nurse about minor medical issues, to buy insurance for their cars, or to talk to a company representative about any number of other situations.

✓ **Outbound:** In an *outbound* call center, agents of the company initiate calls to customers. Your first reaction might be “Telemarketing, right?” Well, yes, a company may call customers in its telemarketing campaign, but companies have a lot of other good reasons to call their customers. Companies may call because the customer hasn’t paid a bill or because a product that the customer wanted has become available; they may call to follow up on a problem that the customer was having or to find out what product or service enhancements the customer wants to see.

✓ **Blended:** Some call centers are *blended* operations, in which agents handle both inbound and outbound calls.

As we outline in Chapter 8, blending, done well, can make call center operations very cost efficient and can improve customer service as well.

Contact or call center: What’s in a name?

The explosion in popularity of the Internet and wireless technologies has changed the way people communicate. People still use the phone (although it’s frequently a cellphone these days), but they also communicate with friends, Romans, and Walmart by using e-mail, online chats, Web forums, and instant messaging. Call centers have responded to this change. In fact, they’re increasingly being called *contact centers* to reflect the fact that they handle more than just phone calls. These facilities are centers for customer contacts in whatever ways customers want to communicate: letters, faxes, Web chats, e-mails, and so on.

Another term that you may have heard is *virtual call center*, in which a group of agents work from their homes instead of being situated at workstations in a building operated by the organization. Some centers are a blend of at-home agents and on-site agents. Working from home is a fantastic arrangement for many employees: The hours are often flexible, and the job has no dress code