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Westin Partner in Study to Determine How to Optimize Your Customer Contact Center

RANCHO CORDOVA, CALIF. – Customers expect their utility to provide exceptional service. They expect answers to questions and responsive problem resolution. Their opinion of the entire utility is often formed in their interaction with the Customer Contact Center.

To help utilities optimize their Customer Contact Centers and integrate them into utility operations, the Water Research Foundation (WaterRF) recently published a study titled “Optimizing the Water Utility Customer Contact Center.” The research project was conducted by a team including Amawalk Consulting Group, LLC; Charles E. Day and Associates; Cognyst Consulting, LLC; and Westin Engineering

The study set out to establish a model for the future water utility Customer Service Center. The study included the following steps:

- Modeled today’s water utility customer contact centers, including best-practices;
- Surveyed out-of-industry customer contact center best practices and trends;
- Defined the future customer contact center; and
- Developed tools to help customer contact centers grow toward the model for the future.

The study showed that most utilities plan to invest in new systems and improvements to address today’s problems. Common short-to-mid-term efforts address initiatives such as implementing customer self service and kiosks; implementing credit card payment; maintaining service levels during peak call volume periods; handling after-hours calls; and addressing regulatory pressure to extend credit.

The study found that other industries are taking a different approach than is common in water utilities. Trends outside the water market include: applying automation and self-service to reduce call time and call volume; workload scheduling; increasing use of remote agents (homeshoring); KPI’s measuring first call resolution (rather than handling time); and focus on retention.

In describing the future water utility contact center, the study included interviews and discussions with water utility CEOs and other experts. The study found that call centers should consider:

- Web and IVR self service;
- 360 degree view of the customer;
- Multi-channel customer service;
- Universal knowledge;
- Fully integrated with utility information systems;
- Dynamic customer satisfaction measurement;
- Unified reporting and administration; and
- Multi-language capable.

The customer contact center of the future will have multiple communications channels; be accessible 24/7; utilize CRM to ensure that each complaint is resolved; and use Business Intelligence (BI) analytics to ensure that all of the information from customer interactions is utilized.

The lessons learned from these efforts were then distilled into a Call Center Optimization Toolkit and pilot tested. The toolkit includes the following components:

- Self-Assessment Tool;
- Benchmarking Tool;
- Improvement Plan Tool; and
- Resource Guide.

The study can be acquired from WaterRF at:

<http://www.waterresearchfoundation.org/research/TopicsAndProjects/projectSnapshot.aspx?pn=4100>

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