

2 New Deals for Merchants.

Expansion of Service Partnership and renewal of 3 year contract

Johannesburg, South Africa, 21 May 2007 - Vodacom, one of South Africa's largest cellular operators, has signed a service partnership contract with Merchants South Africa, the contact centre division of Dimension Data, to expand its current partnership in the Johannesburg CBD.

The expansion deal, which also includes the renewal of an existing 36-month contract with Merchants, will see an additional 130 call centre seats, and 300 staff members, being added to the current 210-seat centre.

Vodacom has experienced unprecedented growth in its customer numbers, especially around its 3G and HSDPA data offerings and the recent introduction of mobile number portability.

"As a result of this growth, we have looked to Merchants to help manage seasonal call traffic amongst our prepaid customers as efficiently as possible," explains Michelle Beaumont, executive head of planning and outsourcing at Vodacom. "With 25 million subscribers in South Africa, Vodacom is always striving to ensure that it delivers quality customer service to its client base. "

The current call centre operated by Merchants in Fox Street, Johannesburg, which has been renewed for a further three years, handles around 110 000 call minutes'-worth of all Vodacom's pre-paid-related incoming calls in four official South African languages.

"As part of the new agreement, excess calls will be re-directed to the new call centre if both Vodacom's own in-house call centre and the existing Merchants call centres are unavailable," says Craig Gibson, general manager, Vodacom business unit at Merchants.

"Based on the fact that the call volumes in the new call centre will be less predictable, the new call centre also has the ability to assist Vodacom in other strategic areas such as allowing agents to make courtesy calls to Vodacom subscribers for retentions, new customer welcome calls or even customer call-backs if they decide to leave a message after holding for a while," he adds.

While staffing is always an area of challenge for any call centre operator, Merchants believes that its approach to capacity development has enabled it to deliver consistent and predictable service levels at Vodacom's call centres and reduce overall staff churn in the process.

"Training and development are amongst the highest priorities in Merchants call centres, which ensures that the call centre agents are able to grow in their careers and deliver consistently good results," Gibson says.

"This is achieved with the help of an international consulting agency, which helps us identify and develop talent, especially for managerial positions."

The expansions to the Vodacom contact centre means that not only gives the cellphone operator the ability to handle an ever-increasing number of calls, but also means that the relationship between itself and Merchants will help the business advance.

“Being able to evaluate our existing solutions and essentially ‘test drive’ certain concepts in this environment is very valuable because it will allow us to drive customer loyalty through a high quality service experience, and that’s what will be our biggest measure of success,” Beaumont concludes.

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