

**BPeSA honours Merchants trainer as “best in SA”.**

**Johannesburg, South Africa, 16 October 2007** - Julia Kgoele of Merchants' outsourced Vodacom contact centre operations has been named as trainer of the year by business process outsourcing industry body, BPeSA.

The awards ceremony, held in Durban last week, was the culmination of weeks of regional finals between Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, where candidates were selected for excellence in various fields and put forward to participate in the national finals.

According to Crag Gibson, general manager for the Vodacom operations at Merchants, the award is positive proof that the industry sees the value in the way that Merchants approaches training, skills and capability development.

“The awards that we were nominated for and, particularly, the award that we won, are aligned with what we would consider to be the most important area of our business, which is our people and their development and management,” says Gibson.

Particularly relevant to the Vodacom operations, Merchants, in partnership with the City of Johannesburg's skills hub, has pioneered the implementation of customised development programmes, which leverage off of the internationally-recognised BTEC qualification for contact centres.

To this extent, Merchants has not only been successful in providing quality training to the staff that resource the outsourced portion of Vodacom's pre-paid contact centre, but also effectively cut the staff attrition rates nearly in half.

The programme itself is achieving huge success in the areas of training and development not only of call centre agents, but also quality management skills – which are currently lacking in the industry.

Based on this success, Merchants says that a number of its existing customers, which include leading UK-based operations, are already interested in adopting a similar programme to the one currently implemented at Vodacom.

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