

## **Merchants recognised at Industry Awards.**

*Acknowledged as a pioneer in international qualification delivery*

**Johannesburg, South Africa, 4 September 2007** - Merchants, the contact centre division of Dimension Data, has been recognised by industry body, ContactInGauteng, with a number of awards for its contact centre operations at Vodacom.

Team leader, Teheer Mohammed, and trainer, Julia Kgoele, both received awards for their performance in the Vodacom call centre, beating off stiff competition from other candidates that were nominated by other call centres throughout Gauteng, Kwazulu Natal and Cape Town.

Mohammed was given the award for “supervisor of the year” while Kgoele achieved the title of “trainer of the year”, which, says Craig Gibson, general manager for the Vodacom operations at Merchants, is something to be very proud of.

In addition to the performance-based awards handed out to Merchants’ staff, the company was also recognised for the pioneering role it continues to play in capability development and delivery of the internationally-recognised BTEC contact centre qualification in partnership with the City of Johannesburg.

Developed and implemented by Merchants’ head of training and capability development, Lynda Bomyer, the BTEC certification, which is a formal internationally-recognised qualification, is currently being piloted at Vodacom with the intention of rolling it out to a number of contact centres across the country.

The programme itself, which has been developed in partnership with the City of Johannesburg’s Business Skills Hub, is achieving huge success in the areas of training and development not only of contact centre agents, but also quality management skills – which are currently lacking in the industry.

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

### Training with a difference

The programme that has been initiated by Merchants, called Destiny, makes use of a number of training stages in an ongoing developmental programme, which incorporates the BTEC qualification and life skills training.

Relevant individuals enter into a “learning contract” with Merchants, which requires that the person commit at least 12 months to the company in return for a BTEC contact centre certification and further skills and competency training.

This offers them the proposition of a medium-to-long-term career and solid developmental growth.

“Traditionally, organisations offering learnerships deducted the cost of the training and development from the learners’ salaries for a specific amount of time until the course was paid off – putting the learner out of pocket from the outset,” Bomyer says.

“While it worked on paper, this approach led to trained agents leaving for higher paying salaries, costing the organisation the time and money it takes to retrain another agent,” she explains.

“Where Merchants’ programme differs is that the cost of the course is paid back to the learner in a lump sum on the successful completion of the course and the obligatory 12 months.”

This shares the risk between both the learner and the organisation, and increases the chances that an agent will stay in a position longer as one obligation of the contract is that if it is not seen through, half the training fees are payable back to Merchants by the agent.

In addition, Merchants has started tapping pools of resources who have previously not been considered for work in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector. This means going outside the usual profile of a contact centre agent, which requires a Matric qualification and relevant work experience

The objective is to grow the number of people who are employable into the sector (essentially those who have not had the opportunity to enter this line of work), which aims to build that holy grail of the BPO sector – sustainable careers for people and consistency for organisations.

“The nature of the awards that we won bears testament to the fact that we are doing something right. They are aligned with what we would consider the most important parts of our business to be, which is creating a learning environment for our people whilst achieving operational excellence. We are trying hard to ensure that we have a very balanced way of developing our people with the right mix of management skills and capability development,” concludes Gibson.

**For further information please contact:**

Vanda Dickson, Marketing & Strategy Development, Merchants  
Tel: +27 11 575 2479  
Email: [vanda.dickson@za.didata.com](mailto:vanda.dickson@za.didata.com)

Lee-Anne Poon, Tribeca Public Relations  
Tel: +27 11 208 5500  
Email: [lee-annep@tribecapr.co.za](mailto:lee-annep@tribecapr.co.za)