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**Creating a Value Monopoly: *Merchants strengthens the scope of contact-centre solutions through strategic service partnerships***

Transformation is known as a process of profound and radical change that orients an organisation in a new direction, taking it to an entirely different level of effectiveness..

For Merchants, a customer contact centre solutions provider and a wholly owned subsidiary of Dimension Data, transformation is about helping clients initiate new ways of thinking and creating new types of executives and customer interaction teams.

“We are constantly looking for ways to add value to our clients and help them as they evolve their business models. And it’s for this reason that we have taken the bold step of progressing our own customer strategy from providing outsourced solutions to developing service partnerships,” says Vanda Dickson, Director of Marketing at Merchants.

“It’s about understanding what our clients really want. And we know they want a level of flexibility, to engage in an environment where both parties are able to recognise each others’ competencies and capabilities and deliver against a business requirement in an aligned and optimised way.”

Vanda says Merchants becomes very entrenched with its clients, using a series of metrics to translate what’s best for each client’s operations and transformation agenda.

“We really try to thoroughly understand their business. By actively analysing the service experience, we are able to provide insights to our customers that hopefully help them grow their business.”

Merchants consults to clients on contact centre and customer management issues and this is made even more practical given the company’s operational capabilities and the fact that they actually do run contact centres.

“We also understand the perceived risk that many clients feel with regard to outsourcing which is why we developed, many years ago, the concept of DBOT – Design, Build, Operate, Transfer. We recognise how important the Design and Build phases of setting up a contact centre are and we therefore bring both core sets of competencies and capabilities to bear in delivering these phases. Whether a client wants us to operate the environment on a 3 month or 3 year contract and then take it back in-house – the benefit of a DBOT is that a client tends to be more deeply involved from the outset which delivers a better result for both parties and assists in mitigating the outsource ‘monkey’,” she says.

“At the end of this process, if the client still wants to bring the contact centre in-house, we go through a transferral of the necessary skills for customers to take-over and manage these facilities, in a planned and managed way.”

“The future for us is about delivering different operating and contracting models to and for our clients so that they can choose what’s good for their business. We are not convinced that there is a ‘one size fits all’. Whilst there are many common operating practices within the operational contact centre industry, it is those clients who understand that the voice of the customer and service experience are most important in their business, who get our approach to help develop greater insight into their customer’s requirements and deliver an ongoing solution that is designed to help them grow. In reality, it is not just about the contact centre – it truly is about the overarching customer experience.”

Examples of where Merchants have looked at new ways of contracting and operating includes our solution for a leading national airline who wanted to redefine its customer interaction centre and build more efficiencies throughout the business.

“We contracted in an entirely transparent way.. This level of transparency is unusual but it is necessary for certain organisations and we are confident in our ability to manage the upside and the downside.”

Another good example is Merchants’ joint venture with TSYS, one of the world’s largest card payment services providers, to deliver a comprehensive range of managed services to financial institutions across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

“The joint venture combines the call-centre capabilities of Merchants with TSYS’ special business unit known as TSYS Managed Services, both of which specialise in customer-servicing operations, including back-office, cross-selling and up-selling activities for financial institutions engaged in card issuing and merchant acquiring,” says Vanda.

“This has worked well for clients such as ABN Amro and Nationwide who can take advantage of the combined focus of both TSYS and Merchants as they continue to deliver advanced managed services.”

This market approach has also been rolled out in the public sector where Merchants is working with the Bahrain eGovernment Authority to establish higher levels of efficiency for citizen-centric services.

“Bahrain is trying to introduce a more service based orientation into their economy. They have recognised that the best way to change the dynamic in the country is to provide all citizens with easy access and interaction channels to government departments and services. They also wanted to create more jobs in Bahrain – especially for women – and what better way to do it than via a contact centre”.

“Once we started working with eGovernment in Bahrain – initially in a consultative manner – it became obvious that by combining the IP of Merchants with the desired service objective of the Bahrain eGovernment Authority, we could deliver an innovative solution to help them develop into a more service based entity. The concept of a JV was a natural extension and Silah Gulf was formed.”

“The objective for Silah Gulf is not only internal to Bahrain but to offer these services to other Gulf states. It is exciting and we believe this illustrates our “strategic partnership” strategy very well.”

Vanda says in most cases Merchants brings its core competencies, experience and intellectual property to bear in the service partnerships it develops.

“We have some cutting-edge metrics and tools that can help our customers transform and develop innovative business models. This empowers them to grow as globally integrated organisations. Essentially we’re creating a value monopoly for everyone involved,” Vanda concludes.

Ends

**Note:**

Proof of the success of the Joint Venture and the concept and strategy of Silah Gulf, is the signing on of the joint venture's first private client – Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC). STC recently signed a five-year contract with Silah Gulf to operate a contact centre in Bahrain employing 100 people. .

“STC's new contact centre, which goes live at the end of February 2010, is on target to deliver great customer service through a world class environment and well trained agents for STC's valued subscribers.”

#### About Merchants

Merchants, a Dimension Data company, is a leading provider of bespoke outsource contact centre solutions with a more than 25 year track record of successfully delivering customers contact centre solutions for a variety of blue chip organisations, globally.