



Client

TalkTalk (part of the The Carphone Warehouse)

Industry

Telecommunications:
Provider of ISP broadband and
landline telephony services

Country

United Kingdom, Europe

Challenge

Rapid set up of an off-shored and outsourced Service Desk to respond to a new service launch and associated increases in customer volumes.

To develop a worldwide support strategy for handling technical support contacts.

Solution

Provision of a Service Desk Support Centre providing diagnostic technical support for 1st and 2nd line broadband telephone and e-mail enquiries, along with landline fault management support and back office services.

TalkTalk Outsourced Customer Service Contact Centre

Technical Service Desk

Merchants has established a turnkey outsourced Technical Support Service Centre solution on behalf of The Carphone Warehouse for their TalkTalk brand in Johannesburg, South Africa, allowing our client to enhance the quality of their customer service offering while also realising significant commercial benefits.

The Merchants contact centre operation is staffed by 200 agents dealing with approximately 80,000 call tickets each month. The contact centre provides single point of contact technical support for 1st and 2nd line broadband enquiries as well as customer support and back office services for TalkTalk's landline products, liaising with both customers and engineers. Approximately 4.2 million UK consumer and business are now supported via TalkTalk's Technical Service Centres.

Client Overview

TalkTalk provides mobile and landline telephony, as well as broadband services to the UK and European markets. Part of The Carphone Warehouse, the group have has over five million customers and 1,900 stores in 10 countries, making them the largest independent mobile phone retailer across Europe.

The Carphone Warehouse, started trading in 1989 and has achieved phenomenal growth, operating in more than 10 countries. They are listed on the London Stock Exchange, and have branched out over the last four years to include ISP and broadband solutions in their offerings.

Business Challenge

The Carphone Warehouse via their TalkTalk brand was the first UK Telco to offer 'free broadband for life' to clients contracting their telephone service, anticipated phenomenal demand, and urgently needed to increase capacity, while maintaining the reputation for quality their brand stood for. Already operating two centres in the UK, supported with two outsourced centres in India inherited through acquisition, a decision was made to consolidate growth requirements in South Africa thus mitigating quality risk, providing ease of travel on a similar time-zone whilst securing attractive commercial savings vis a vis the UK. This would evolve into the largest offshore investment by a UK company ever into South Africa.

Entering a new geography, TalkTalk quickly recognised the benefits of partnering with a locally based, domestic provider to ensure they'd truly realise the benefits upon which their business case was based.

The strategic advantage of entering into a new region utilising Merchants experience and proven track record combined with the added benefit of being able to access the technology solution through the Dimension Data (Merchants is a Dimension Data company) was a distinct advantage. In fact, TalkTalk's management team specifically cited the benefit of having a single point of contact for establishing the new services and solutions was a compelling reason for engaging with Merchants and Dimension Data.

Results/Outcomes

- ▲ Merchants enhanced Reporting Suite allowed better tracking and management of trouble tickets through an in-house database, thus reducing call-backs
- ▲ Domain expertise Knowledge Management System, enabled reductions in handling time.
- ▲ Ticket tracking system integrated to agent desktops enabling improved customer management processes and automated in/outbound update mechanism
- ▲ Offshore solution provided 30% reduction in costs further complemented by 20% improvement in productivity levels
- ▲ Fix performance amongst highest in the business
- ▲ Increased flexibility enabled pilot trial projects not available within in-house operations.
- ▲ Specialised consultancy led approach proactively identified process improvements
- ▲ AHT reduced by up to 25%

Incredibly, Merchants set-up TalkTalk's outsourced Johannesburg operation in 6 weeks. Combined with the above decision, TalkTalk recognised the advantages of South Africa and embarked on a plan to set up a captive operation using the learnings from the set-up with Merchants to streamline the initialisation of their own operation. Dimension Data were the partner of choice in the provisioning of the IT infrastructure for this centre based in Cape Town, creating efficiencies and economies of scale, with the entire solution provided via a single contract

Between the two South Africa operations, all types of trouble tickets and contacts can be handled, and with TalkTalk's sites in the UK, India and South Africa they have a resilient network of contact centres and an ability to balance call types to the relevant skills and cost profiles.

Relationship History

The Merchants operation is now entering into the fourth year of operations. Over this period, the scope of the operations has extended and Merchants now deliver a greater range of specialised technical support. The Merchants team support 1st and 2nd line broadband and Wi-Fi technical queries as well as fixed line 1st line and back office technical support. Merchants became the first operation within TalkTalk to prove the concept of a *Single Point of Contact* resolving end to end technical queries from one location.

Solution Provided

- Go-live within three months of contract approval.
- 1st Level Technical Support out performing all existing operations after first month.
- Peak resource level of 400 FTE delivered inside 6 month window.
- Scope of delivery subsequently expanded to include 2nd level technical team, back office team and e-mail correspondence group.

The flexibility of contract has allowed TalkTalk to streamline the resource requirement in line with contacts per customer leveling out. The current solution profile is split:

Broadband and Wireless 1st line support	Broadband and Wireless 2nd line support	Fixed line voice faults	Voice faults back office	Flexible team cross skilled
75 Agents	70 Agents	15 Agents	10 Agents	20 Agents

“Bureaucracy always plays a role at captive sites because sites and facilities need to go through a procurement process in terms of governance regulations. Merchants is able to rapidly deliver on TalkTalk’s requirements without these limitations.”

Sandra Galer, Regional Operations Director, Merchants Africa

How We Delivered

All agents come into the call centre with previous customer service experience and are assessed for appropriate levels of technical competence. Training is vital in Merchants’ operations and new recruits undergo an intensive 6 week training period on 1st line technical support which gives them a good foundation on which to build their skills. Our knowledge based management approach ensures consistencies and eases the learning curve, with information easily accessible and top query types regularly monitored. This training includes 2 weeks *‘on the job training’* taking live calls in a supervised environment with dedicated coaching support so that neither the agent nor the customer is compromised. Only those passing the testing phase are released into live operations.

Sandra Galer Regional Operations Director, Merchants Africa says,

“Our training is very focused because agents could, at any given time, deal with numerous interface systems for the client. The training is intense, but we need to ensure that all agents are equipped to service customers quickly and effectively.”

After leaving the training environment agents receive ongoing dedicated coaching support and feedback from both their Team Manager as well as an independent Quality Assurance team. This ensures that the behaviours developed and embedded within training are optimised for maximum performance in the live environment. Targets are graduated to ensure that team members are phased into the role and afforded every opportunity to develop their skills and provide a unique level of service.

Merchants technology group were consequentially able to quickly integrate the existing in-house management systems to our own and provide both users and clients alike an enhanced service experience. In essence, we were able to update customers more proactively and efficiently, as well as improving on accurately closing off faults, therefore significantly improving first call resolution and reducing callbacks.

Value Derived

Beyond the original commercial benefits being realised, complemented by a surge in quality, the centre has continued to go from strength to strength, consistently recognised as the TalkTalk Group’s top performing technical site worldwide. As such we have become a trusted test bed for new products, services and systems. Prior to a full launch Merchants may be asked to trial a system and via a proactive consultancy based approach, provide time and motion feedback on the impact on customer service, first time fix, call duration, etc. This allows process changes to be fully optimised and issues resolved prior to full launch

The TalkTalk Group acknowledges that one of the main benefits of outsourcing their operations to Merchants is flexibility. If they need a demand after hours, or additional capacity, Merchants is able to respond very very quickly.

South Africa’s reputation as *‘the Quality option’* for offshore solutions is reaffirmed via this contact centre operation. Commercial savings are significant, with Merchants uniquely placed to offer both the technology systems and resource expertise at strategic partnership level and via a single contract.