



# Success Factors for remote and home based agent programmes: Case Study Based Evidence

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Telstra

## Prepared by:

*callcentres.net Pty Ltd*

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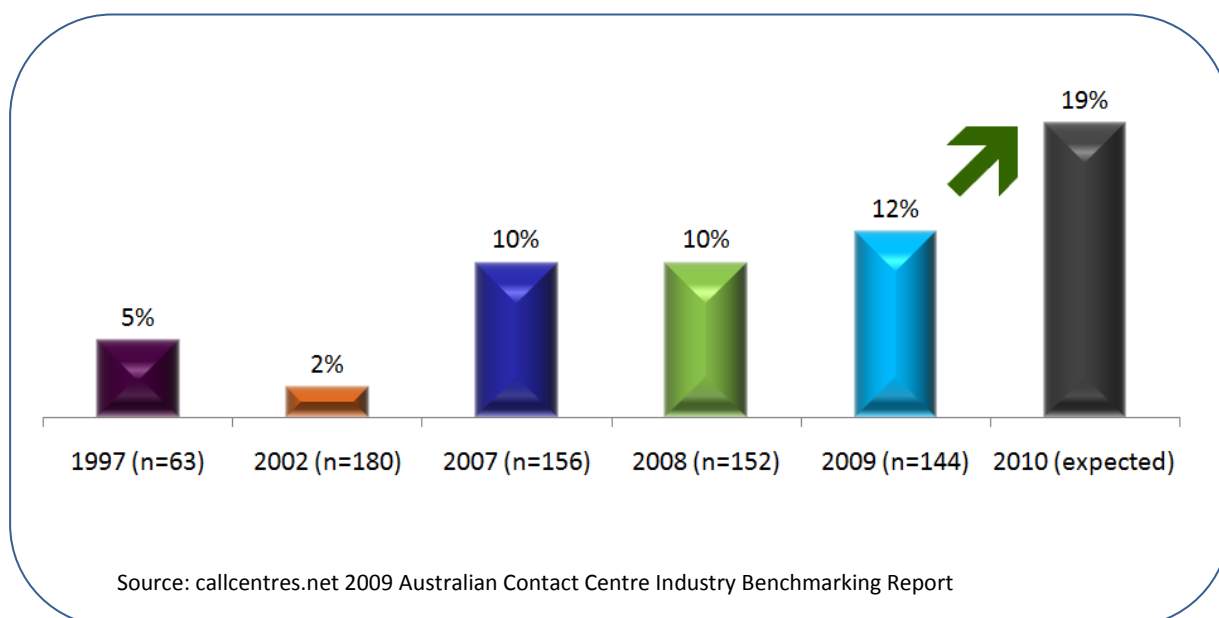
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## 1. Introduction

The use of remote and home based agents continues to be one of the hottest topics in the contact centre industry. In 2009, over one in ten (12%) contact centres had agents working from a remote location or home office and this figure is expected to rise to 19% in 2010 (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> However, whilst the proportion of centres that have agents working remotely or from home is increasing year on year, adoption is slower than predicted. This may be due to a low level of familiarity with this “new” contact centre model and a lack of available information and data in the industry about how this model can be implemented successfully.

Figure 1: Proportion of contact centres in Australia with remote or home based agents



With an increasing number of organisations looking to introduce this work model, the Australian contact centre industry is in an urgent need of information on how to deliver a successful remote and home based agent programme.

In 2009, Telstra responded to this need by sponsoring callcentres.net to write a whitepaper titled, [\*The Future of Contact Centres: Virtualisation, Remote and Home Based Agents\*](#), which was based on a study of 55 Australian based organisations and their use of and attitudes towards remote and home-based agent models. Telstra now continues its Thought Leadership programme on this topic

<sup>1</sup> callcentres.net 2009 Australian Contact Centre Industry Benchmarking Report, Sydney, June 2009.

through the sponsoring of this report, *'Success Factors for remote and home based agent programmes: Case Study Based Evidence'*.

One of the key findings in the 2009 whitepaper was that the overall key factors in having a successful remote and home based agent programme included:

1. Availability and ongoing support of technology.
2. Management and communication with remote and home based employees.
3. Suitability of employees.

Further analysis of those organisations which currently use remote and home based agents, found that while the availability and ongoing support of technology remained the top consideration, suitable employees was the next most important factor in having a successful programme. This was followed by management and communication with remote and home based employees, having an appropriate OH&S programme and adequate employee training.

To further investigate the key factors for successful remote and home based agent programmes from the perspective of those organisations currently using this model, callcentres.net conducted in-depth interviews with Australian and New Zealand organisations that are at the forefront of using remote and home based agents. This report sets out the key lessons learned from these experienced organisations.

## 2. Case Study Vignettes

In-depth interviews were conducted with three case study organisations and gained insight into the key factors behind their successful implementation of a remote and home based agent programme.

During the interviews organisations were asked to reflect on key aspects of implementing and managing a remote and home based agent programme. These aspects included drivers of implementation, objectives of the programme, challenges faced and adjustments needed to the on-going programme to ensure the best outcomes for the organisation.

The three case study organisations included were:

Salmat provides customer contact solutions, targeted media solutions and business process outsourcing. Salmat has run a remote and home based agent programme for three years with over 300 agents based at home.



VicRoads is the Victorian state government agency responsible for managing the arterial road network and processing over 20 million registrations and licensing transactions each year. VicRoads have 30 remote based multi channelled consultants, operating for the last two years.

Fisher and Paykel, designer, manufacturer and marketer of household appliances, has been running a home based agent programme for more than four and a half years, with a team of 5 technical specialists.

### 3. Case Study: Salmat

#### Salmat

#### Information gathered from Jacob Murray-White, General Manager Salmat

April 2010

Salmat is a customer communications organisation. Within its Customer Contact Solutions division, it offers a comprehensive range of contact centre services providing both inbound and outbound capabilities.

Salmat has run a home based agent program as a component of its contact centre service for three years and has over 300 home based contractors in Australia and New Zealand. Salmat studied the remote and home based industry that had developed in the United States and saw that to maintain market leadership they needed to add the home based call centre to allow them to provide higher quality call centre service at a lower cost.

“From a client’s perspective, we deliver better quality, more flexibility and at a better cost.”

For Salmat, the success of the home based agent program has come from the high quality, efficient and flexible service that they were able to provide.

## Planning phase

The initiative behind the remote and home based agent program was that the technology was available to facilitate a home based call centre and that the service would add an additional offering to satisfy the needs of their clients.

The decrease in bricks and mortar costs and the positive effect home based work has on reducing carbon emissions are all part of why Salmat considered home based work and have found increasing support from clients.

Technology advances had made possible the delivery of remote and home based work more practical. Salmat was not required to provide their contractors with hardware; as their system technology delivered a highly secure, easy to use and compatible remote desktop solution.

#### Key Reasons for Success:

1. Flexibility
2. Efficiency
3. Quality

A commitment to quality was an integral part of the home based program for Salmat. The system technology helped through controlling what the agents could see and do.

High quality output was also a motivator behind the online learning system. This online learning approach delivered a move from traditional instructors using PowerPoint presentations. The accreditation team facilitated the online learning and development modules, accreditations and competency assessments and also provided support during the home based contractors' initial development period.

The high quality service that Salmat set as its objective was aided by the initial agent profile criteria, ensuring the contractors that worked for them were suitable for both the call centre based work and working from home.

Salmat identified qualities and skill sets which make an ideal home based agent. A key concern was the strong desire from the agent to work from home and have a long term view of the position. The majority of Salmat home based contractors are located in regional and outer suburban areas across Australia and New Zealand. Their average age is 38.

“We have dedicated sessions where we ask our contractors to complete certain tasks to confirm their knowledge. We have also enhanced our virtual support when go live.”

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## Implementation phase

This geographic diversity required the establishment of an online community. Salmat established a number of online environments to facilitate agent interaction. The growth of social networking sites such Facebook and Twitter have also enhanced the virtual community and allowed Salmat's web savvy contractor group to seamlessly interact.

Salmat established an online chat room that was moderated by Salmat management, creating a space for social interaction, knowledge development and feedback generation. The online community proved a successful tool for generating feedback and a thriving organisational culture subsequently evolved.

Salmat believed the home based online community had a stronger sense of connection, was more vibrant and more fun, than many bricks and mortar call centres. They maintain that its home based contractors were happy and in control of their work environment. This was reflected through the low turnover rate and the strength of word of mouth which meant that no advertising for contractors was required for the following two years.

The demographic of the home based agents proved to be critical to the success for Salmat due to the strong connection between the contractors

“It gives us a good sense of what is going on and what needs to be resolved. People are understanding and supportive of it.”

and those calling the call centres. This allowed for a greater understanding and empathy with the customer and more effective call resolution.

The learning and development process implemented in the planning phase was effective in delivering knowledge based assessments but the practical delivery of calls needed to be better supported. Consequently the process was strengthened to include more interaction to ensure people were more competent and confident in their responsibilities.

Furthermore, the accreditation team regularly reviewed the online learning and development programs to keep it relevant, accurate and in line with the business requirements.

OH&S policy also necessitated ongoing vigilance. When a fall below the set OH&S standard was identified, action was taken to stop the contractor working from their home based office until the standard was remedied. Salmat believes this practice of ongoing monitoring and intervention is critical to producing a strong and robust OH&S programme.

“The online culture is number one! It is vital to our culture.”

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## Post implementation phase

Salmat attributes its home based contractor success to the suitability of the agents to the work, the work environment, OH&S policies and the support through the online chat room.

The online chat room facilitated discussions that provided contractor feedback direct to management. Salmat believes they have learnt a lot about their business through these forums and were able to capture a good sense of what was going on and what needed to be resolved. Giving people the opportunity to contribute and engage with colleagues, as well as management, ensured the high quality call centre service was maintained.

The engagement and support of the home based contractors was crucial in not only providing a high quality service but also in attaining a high level of contractor flexibility. Each home based contractor had the option to choose their work hours, allowing them to have complete control of when and how long they worked for. This had an added advantage of Salmat being able to provide to clients extra capacity during their times of high demand. Indeed, Salmat could effectively double its workforce in real time and supply its clients extra capacity for limited periods.

The flexibility of the structure and the dynamic workforce, have been critical to the success of the home based program for Salmat. Ensuring that their contractors are highly competent and thereafter kept engaged is the

“It’s the desire of the agent group to make this work which has made this a success along with our ability to provide appropriate IT and learning systems.”

focus for Salmat to maintain its market leader position in the call centre industry.

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### **Technology Usage**

Salmat use the following systems to enable the Remote and Home based agent programme to operate effectively;

#### **Telephony Platform:**

Desktop delivered by Citrix with RSA

Telephony we use Avaya and Alcatel depending on the client

#### **Quality Monitoring:**

Higher Ground

#### **Remote Assist:**

Citrix (shadow) is used for “in session” support, Bomgar for “out of session” support

#### **Workforce Planning:**

Genesys

#### **CRM tools:**

Differs between clients. Range from Siebel through to client delivered web portals.

#### **ROI:**

Initial investment was recouped in the first year of operation.

## 4. Case Study: VicRoads

### VicRoads

Information gathered from Annette Morgan, Contact Centre Manager,  
VicRoads

April 2010

VicRoads is the Victorian state government agency responsible for managing the arterial road network and processing over 20 million registrations and licensing transactions each year. VicRoads has over 160 call centre agents in their two main call centres as well as 30 remote based multi channelled consultants. VicRoads has been operating remote based agents for the last two years.

These multi channelled consultants have a dual purpose: they work in the Customer Service Offices on the counters and as a remote call centre operator in this same office. This set up gives the business extra capacity easing the pressure on the main call centres.

*“What stood out was because we had so much variety of calls, it helps the Customer Service Offices as they encounter different scenarios, so their technical knowledge grew and the managers just loved it as their knowledge was constantly improving”.*

### Planning phase

The objective of the remote agent programme was to facilitate additional calls coming into the VicRoads call centre.

Enabling regional office based staff to absorb the extra pressure at peak times included several advantages identified by VicRoads at the planning stage. The potential multi channelled consultants were existing staff that were product trained and available as the business requirements dictated.

The skills needed for the multi channelled consultants included those who were flexible, adaptable and able to handle the pressure that may be encountered through call centre work.

#### Key Reasons for Success:

1. Suitable staff including technical skills and attitude.
2. Customer Service Centre manager buy-in as they see the benefits.
3. Transparency of KPI reporting.

As the consultants already possessed product knowledge, the training that was given initially revolved around telephone technique. This was conducted through classroom training in the call centre followed by a 'buddy system' of support. This training system was reinforced through a support line to aid the resolution of any problems the remote multi channelled consultants encountered. In addition, supervisors could manually take over consultants screens to talk them through the training as needed through the use of remote support.

Consideration of OH&S requirements was limited as the consultants were already established in the regional offices. One aspect that had to be taken into account was that the consultants did need to be physically located near fellow colleagues to reduce any sense of isolation.

VicRoads existing IT operations, including system access, data security and IT support were extended from the established regional offices to the remote consultants and were found to support the remote operations effectively.

Management support was an essential aspect of the planning stage for the remote operator programme for VicRoads. This included engaging the customer service managers whose counter staff would be reclassified to include their call centre responsibilities. This affected their daily operations as staff would be taken off the counters and put on the phones as needed.

The business plan developed for the remote multi channelled consultants was established together with the call centre management and customer service managers. This ensured a coherent and transparent view of who was responsible for what tasks and was then widely communicated to the relevant stakeholders.

“They could absorb the amount of work and because they were already trained, it didn't impact the business to get more people on the phones.”

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## Implementation phase

The support of management continued to be critical to the ongoing remote operator programme. The consultants gained valuable technical knowledge through their exposure to the increased number and variety of queries they handled on the phone; something that then could be applied to their work in the regional offices. This was appreciated by the customer service managers as it helped their regional offices with the queries they encountered to be dealt with more effectively and efficiently.

VicRoads recently introduced a two-tier system for handling queries. The first tier takes the first 75% of calls and the second tier taking the remaining 25% of calls of a more complicated nature. The multi channelled consultants received further training for these new responsibilities.

The training system was revised to include classroom training followed by training in the call centre with a buddy sitting with the operator. This system ensured the multi channelled consultants felt more involved and part of the larger call centre team. They were exposed to the overall call centre environment and connected via the support line as they required from their remote location.

“Each agent had to be more knowledgeable and a lot more training was involved.”

The support of the remote multi channelled consultants extended to a monthly meeting as part of the remote call centre team. The remote agents reported to one team leader who also manages their KPIs and performance plan.

Feedback from the consultants emphasised the importance of the visible reporting of their KPIs. They could view their previous day’s statistics as well as an overall KPI report at the end of each month. Further to the reporting of each agents’ KPIs, the managers remotely monitored calls for quality control purposes. The results of the remote monitoring and KPIs were covered at monthly meetings between customer service managers and call centre managers.

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## Post implementation phase

One area of challenge that VicRoads had to contend with was the balance of duties of the multi channelled consultants. For example, when customer service managers became short on counter staff they wanted to ‘borrow’ resources from the call centre. This in turn left the call centre short of people on the phones. This issue was identified in productivity reports of the multi channelled consultants and subsequently addressed in the meetings between management.

“We needed the customer service managers to be behind the idea. So when they have someone out on sick leave, they don’t take someone off the phones to put them on the office counter. We needed management support.”

The support of the multi channelled consultants themselves was highlighted as a critical element to deliver a high quality service.

This support extended to physically seeing managers on a fortnightly basis. Managers would sit with the multi channelled consultants and engage in building rapport. This level of transparent support and high level of feedback was seen as critical to the success of the remote programme for VicRoads.

This support of the remote based operator programme was assured with the additional benefits being realised, including improved flexibility and productivity for the call centre in addition to an improvement in staff technical knowledge for counter service.

## 5. Case Study: Fisher and Paykel

### Fisher and Paykel

Information gathered from Stephen Diss, Operations Manager, Fisher and Paykel

April 2010

Fisher & Paykel Appliances designs, manufactures and markets a wide range of household appliances. The contact centre for Fisher & Paykel support the customer queries regarding household appliances as well as technical support for the installation and maintenance queries. The contact centre employs over 170 people including a technical specialist team of five who are home based agents.

Fisher & Paykel have had a home based agent programme in place for five years. The principal objective was to acquire the right people to fulfil the technical specialist role.

*“The main thing for us was highly skilled people that could work autonomously and work in different parts of Australia and New Zealand”.*

Home based agents provided the flexibility for finding the right people in any location in Australia and New Zealand. Although there were reservations from senior management that people may not be held accountable when they are not in the office, these doubts were overcome by the benefits the programme brought to the contact centre service such as flexibility, efficiency and access to the right people for the technical specialist roles.

### Planning phase

The home based agent program for Fisher & Paykel was planned with the objective of finding suitable employees. Finding agents that had the ability to work independently was a key factor in the recruitment of technical specialists who also had the skills and experience working with household appliances.

The major obstacle to overcome in the planning phase for Fisher & Paykel was technology and telephony. It was a process of trial and error to get the

Key Reasons for success:

1. The right people
2. Clear understanding of the goals and job requirements
3. Cohesive and supportive team environment

best 'service router phone call flow technology', to ensure the incoming calls were directed to an available agent, no matter where the location was or on what server. Fisher & Paykel use Avaya CMS which initially had teething problems integrating with the 'Road Warrior' software used for the remote agents.

The call distribution system presented further difficulties counting the calls between the Australian and New Zealand switches. Complications with the digital IP technology presented challenges to identify the problem between the phone network, programming of the phones or the interflow.

Ensuring the home office environment was safe and secure includes both data integrity as well as the physical well being of the home based agent. Every home based agent required a broadband internet connection at home to enable access to the internal system. A security certificate was issued before home based agents were able to log into the system securely. This aspect was covered off with few issues. The process of ensuring all health and safety concerns were addressed was a similarly smooth process with the management of Fisher & Paykel and the home based agents working together to establish and maintain a high standard of safe work practices.

"We could see what the requirement was and why we needed to do it, we knew that the technology was available, we needed the flexibility..."

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## Implementation phase

The company induction that was conducted post recruitment was a critical element of the implementation of the home based agent programme. This ensured the technical specialists understood what their job requirements and to have a good idea of the company culture.

The support of the agents includes the home based agents reporting to a team leader who would have daily interactions as well as weekly team meetings held via video link, phone and online. This formal structure of support is aided by the organic interaction between home based agents as the need to make contact arises.

The implementation phase brought a complication with call segregation as the package wasn't 'unwrapping' the call properly once it was delivered to an agent. This issue was the only technology aspect that needed attention at the implementation phase.

The initial investment in the home based agent programme was beginning to realise benefits at this time as agents were sourced from outer metropolitan and regional areas rather than metropolitan areas where the cost of wages would be higher.

"We were retaining agents and they were comfortable with it and we checked they were happy dealing with the technology and a lot of them were very comfortable working from home..."

## Post implementation phase

The success of the home based agent program is partially attributed to the suitability of the agents to the work. Holding on to these highly skilled technical specialist who work odd hours and on a rotational roster is also credited to the open feedback within the home based programme. A formal performance review is supplemented by ad hoc feedback about what is working well and suggestions for solutions as to what might work best with the team leader and management.

“They want to work from home, they want to do that job, they are highly skilled and we want to be able to employ them”

Training and development evolved further post implementation to be more accessible to the home based agents with the inception of ‘You tube’ style video presentations. This meant new product developments can be delivered to a common server to be accessed at a convenient time by all users from their home or office work place allowing for an efficient and timely delivery of product information and development guides.

Fisher & Paykel have seen the benefits of implementing a home based agent programme through the access to the right people to fulfil their business requirements. The success of this programme is attributed to the technology structure that is enabled to support the right people, with a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve within a supportive team environment.

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### Technology Usage

Fisher & Paykel use the following systems to enable the Remote and Home based agent programme to operate effectively;

#### Telephony Platform:

Avaya CMS and Road Warrior

#### Quality Monitoring:

NICE call recorder system used with Avaya CMS and Impact 360 roster package

#### Remote Assist:

Reach Out

#### Workforce Planning:

Impact 360

#### CRM tools:

Wilke Thornton Customer Response System

#### ROI:

Staff retention used to measure success

## 6. The benefits derived from remote and home based agents

The benefits realised from remote and home based agent programmes were consistent across the case study organisations, with the primary benefits being:

- 1) Increased flexibility of the workforce;
- 2) Increased efficiency;
- 3) Higher productivity;
- 4) Increased effectiveness and quality;
- 5) The minimisation of infrastructure costs;
- 6) High workforce management optimisation including:
  - Very low shrinkage
  - Very low sick leave
  - High adherence rates
- 7) 10-20% cost savings compared to traditional contact centre models.

A consistent factor in organisations realising the benefits of remote and home based agent programmes was the eagerness of the remote and home based agents themselves, their focus on making the remote or home based work arrangement successful.

The three case study organisations commented that the benefits of the programme, in comparison with on-site agents, are that remote or home based agents tend to be:

- a) more satisfied;
- b) more productive,
- c) more efficient ; and
- d) more loyal.

## 7. Challenges to remote and home based programmes

The most significant challenge to organisations was gaining the support of senior management and overcoming the view that remote and home based work would not be productive and may not be managed effectively. The top four challenges experienced by the case study organisation included:

1. Management resistance to the concept of remote and home based agents and management's need to physically see employees' onsite;
2. Gaining buy-in from Senior Management with regard to the effectiveness and benefits of remote and home based agents;
3. Technology that routes calls effectively to remote and home based agents; and
4. Remote and home based agents feeling isolated.

The case study organisations noted that advancement in technology has helped organisations overcome some of the challenges in operating a remote and home based agent programme. Remote support and system technology has reduced call routing concerns and improved the management of productivity through access controls and forms of live KPI reporting. Online communication through social media and collaborative technologies has resulted in higher levels of engagement and interaction between remote and home based agents and their organisations.

## 8. The Success Factors

The three case study interviews highlighted the following factors as key to any successful implementation of a remote and home based agent programme. The key factors covered are:

1. Performance Management;
2. Human Resources;
3. Occupational Health & Safety; and
4. Technology.

### 8.1 Performance management success factors for remote and home based agent programmes

Organisations currently face unprecedented pressure to grow their customer base and effectively service their existing customers. In this quest for high standards of service performance management becomes critical. For remote and home based agents, this is perhaps even more critical as agents are not in close proximity to colleagues or supervisors. The case studies highlighted that ensuring there is a consistent approach to remote monitoring of calls and KPI reporting is essential to the success of remote or home based agent programmes. The top 8 key performance management considerations for remote and home based agent programmes are:

1. Using the same call centre metrics to measure performance of remote and home based agents as are used to measure the performance of on-site agents;
2. Conducting remote monitoring of calls and screen capture;
3. In some organisations, 3% of calls are monitored which is higher than onsite agents;
4. Agents can see performance results from the previous day and know their performance scores regularly;
5. There is a high degree of performance feedback given to remote and home based agents, often higher than levels of feedback given to onsite agents;
6. There is a high level of management support, for example, remote and home based agents may report to a team leader and to a manager;
7. Strong Quality Assurance programmes are set up for remote and home based agents; and

8. The setting up of Accreditation teams who also carry out training and development of remote and home based agents.

The case-study organisations commented that a strong emphasis on a solid performance management strategy should have a positive effect on agents' motivation and commitment.

## 8.2 Human resource requirements remote and home based agent programmes

Consistent across the case study organisations were certain skills and traits identified by organisations as ideal for remote and home based agents. Typically the agents were identified to be:

- Existing employees who are experienced and technically sound or with strong product knowledge;
- Mature people with significant life experience;
- Often female workers;
- Technically proficient;
- Have strong phone based or verbal customer service skills;
- Able to work autonomously and independently;
- People who want to be in control of their work environment; and
- People looking for a work/life balance.

Other important Human Resource Management aspects depend on either the model of remote or home based programme that is being implemented or the maturity of the programme. These are:

- The majority of remote and home based agents tend to be outer urban or regional based;
- Remote and home based agent recruitment programmes look for flexibility in the approach, attitude and work style of the employee;
- On-boarding of recruits, getting them set up, oriented, inducted and trained in remote and home based work is very important;
- Mature remote and home based agent programmes may recruit external to the organisation, however less mature programmes will tend to recruit internally for experienced employees;

- An agreement between the manager and an individual remote and home based agent is very important regarding expectations and performance standards;
- In the public sector, there may be a need to reclassify workers to a higher classification if there is an increase in their responsibilities;
- Different models of training for recruits exist: New employees tend to have training in a classroom environment followed by a main call centre experience. Experienced employees had training which was more frequently in the remote and home based environment with online support;
- A support phone line was a frequently used tool to aid remote and home based agents who had queries or challenges;
- Often remote and home based agents met on a regular basis in person, at the office. In mature programmes there may be no need for remote and home based agents to meet in person;
- Organisations with mature remote and home based programmes tended to have fully online training programmes, online mentoring and a strong remote and home based agent online community and chat rooms. Whilst less mature programmes were more likely to require agents to attend call centre and class room based training before working as a remote and home based agent; and
- Organisations noted that geographic diversity had added to the richness of their workforce.

### 8.3 OH&S Success factors for remote and home based agent programmes

Maintaining a robust Occupational Health & Safety policy was an aspect that was identified as essential for a well functioning remote and home based agent programme. Comments related to OH&S by the case study organisations included:

1. In the programme planning phase, an agreement needs to be reached by both the agent and the organisation to maintain a high workplace standard;
2. Remote and home based agent site checks must be conducted. The frequency and format of site checks depends on the organisation size and programme maturity;

3. If a site fails a site check then the remote and home based agent programme should not be continued at that site;

Although OH&S was not identified as being a challenge for organisations, ongoing monitoring and maintenance of OH&S standards was seen to be a mandatory requirement to ensure the safety of their remote or home based agents.

#### **8.4 Technology considerations for remote and home based agent programmes**

Ensuring that the technology used for a remote and home based agent programme is seamless and secure was identified as essential for success. The key case study findings related to technology include:

1. Overall, technology was not mentioned as a significant challenge in setting up remote and home based agents' programmes;
2. There were some issues reported with switching routing calls appropriately to remote and home based agents between onsite;
3. Remote support is regarded as being of critical importance;
4. Supervisors can manually take over screens if necessary for problem solving;
5. The setting up of remote and home based agents' online communities is very important;
6. An effectively moderated online chat room for remote and home based agents was seen as significant in the success of the programme;
7. There were some reports of trouble with the quality of phone line clarity for remote and home based agents; and
8. Knowledge management systems and online support are seen as critical for a successful remote and home based agent programme.

## 9. Conclusions

The analysis of the Salmat, Fisher and Paykel and VicRoads case studies has revealed four factors that consistently appear in organisations with successful remote and home based agent programmes.

These four factors relate to:

1. Performance Management;
2. Human Resources;
3. Occupational Health & Safety; and
4. Technology.

Successful remote and home based agent programmes tended to have **Performance Management** systems that included:

- Using contact centre metrics, KPIs and reporting systems that are consistent with the onsite contact centre;
- Regular remote monitoring which occurs at a more frequent rate than onsite agent monitoring;
- Active and transparent agent performance reporting and feedback.

Successful remote and home based agent programmes tended to have **Human Resource** policies and processes that offered roles to:

- Experienced agents, particularly those with developed technical skills or product knowledge;
- More mature workers;
- Agents who wanted or were able to be flexible in their work style and arrangements;
- Agents who had demonstrated that they could work autonomously;
- Workers who were seeking a better work/life balance;
- Agents who are predominantly regionally based;
- Employees who could develop remote but effective relationships with managers and supervisors, and who overcome any sense of isolation.

Successful remote and home based agent programmes tended to have **OH&S** programmes that included:

- Well documented and understood OH&S policies and practices;
- Regular onsite home based agent and office checks;

- Immediate addressing of any shortfalls in OH&S or termination of the home based site upon failure of a site check.

Successful remote and home based agent programmes tended to have **Technology** which allowed for:

- Reliable remote support;
- Online training and development;
- Social media sites dedicated to the programme;
- A high level of data security.

The case study organisations also highlighted that in order to realise the benefits of a remote and home based agent programme, these key factors were required to be thoroughly planned and reviewed regularly. Although the case study organisations did mention challenges with their remote and home based agent programmes, which primarily related to gaining senior management support and some technology issues, these challenges were overcome through consistently communicating the benefits realised from the remote and home based agent programme. That is, when compared to onsite agents, remote and home based agent programmes delivered increased flexibility, greater efficiency and higher productivity.

## 10. Definitions of Terms

The following definitions have been used during the in-depth interviews with contact centre managers and senior executives involved in the management of the participating contact centres.

### 1. Virtualisation

Virtualisation of the contact centre enables multiple contact centre locations to be part of a single virtual contact centre. Virtualisation allows for a few contact centre locations with larger groups of agents through to large numbers of locations with a few or even single agents in each location.

### 2. Home Based Agent

The Home Based Agent is a component of the Virtual Contact Centre, where a proportion of, or all, agents works from home and collectively forms a single virtual contact centre.

### 3. Remote Agents

Contact centres using Remote Agents provide facilities for smaller groups of agents to work close to where the agent populations live, for example in regional areas.

## 11. Contact Details

### 11.1 About Telstra

Telstra is Australia's leading telecommunications and information services company and offers a full range of services and products in telecommunications markets throughout Australia.

Our major strength in providing integrated telecommunications services is our vast geographical coverage, provided through our fixed and mobile network infrastructure. Telstra's integrated Next IP™ and Next G™ networks are core to our network infrastructure and offer enterprise and government customers world-class network-based solutions that are fundamentally changing the way we communicate, work and conduct business.

Telstra manages more than 25,000 contact centre seats and 10,000+ IVR ports in Australia, in order to handle around 300 million calls annually. As Australia's leading provider of customer contact solutions, Telstra is uniquely positioned to help maximise investment in contact centre technology by providing the most suitable solution that will assist in business transformation. Telstra offers a comprehensive portfolio of hosted, co-hosted and Customer Premise Equipment (CPE) based solutions and services, backed by over 100 contact centre experts.

#### About Telstra Enterprise & Government

Telstra Enterprise & Government (TE&G) is the leading provider of network based solutions and services to enterprise and governments in Australia and New Zealand and offers you:

- The most innovative product and solution portfolio in Australia and New Zealand
- Dedicated teams of highly skilled accredited specialists
- Close alliances and partnerships with global players
- The simplest engagement and most responsive customer service
- The financial strength to invest in the most advanced technology for our customers

We provide unique and integrated voice, data and mobile services and solutions to around 1,500 enterprise and government customers in Australia, and offer a growing range of differentiated and world-leading products and solutions delivered over Telstra's unique Next IP™ and Next G™ networks.

For more information please contact:

Nick Duggan

Business Development Manager

Contact Centre Solutions

Telstra Enterprise and Government

Tel: +61 3 8647 0557

Mob: +61 416 066 981

[www.telstraenterprise.com](http://www.telstraenterprise.com)

## 11.2 About callcentres.net

callcentres.net Pty Ltd, incorporated in 1998, part of the ACA Research Group, is a service strategy consultancy, research, benchmarking and online publishing company dedicated to the Australian and Asia Pacific service, contact centre and outsourcing sectors. Based in Sydney with a regional offices in KL and Singapore, having over 9000 executive subscribers, callcentres.net is recognised as the leading provider of consulting, research and information pertaining to the service and contact centre sectors.

Services offered include:

### Service Strategy Consulting

The following consulting services are provided:

1. service strategy consulting: enterprise wide multi-channel service strategy (face2face, voice, web and social media channels);
2. contact centre strategy (voice, speech recognition, ivr, email, online, web chat and social media channels);
3. diagnostic reviews of service operations; and
4. benchmarking performance and cost comparisons.

## Research

1. Market sizing and growth studies;
2. Customer engagement research: B2B and B2C; CustomerEngage©;
3. Qualitative, Quantitative, Online research;
4. Innovative Customer Story Telling research methodologies;
5. Contact centre market indices such as Consumer Index, Technology Index;
6. Outsourcing sector industry research;
7. Location and investment attraction studies;
8. Employee engagement studies: EmployeeEngage©;
9. Human resources research; and
10. Contact centre technology research.

## Benchmarking

1. Annual Contact Centre Industry Benchmarking Reports: Australia; New Zealand, China, India, The Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam;
2. Contact Centre Consumer Index;
3. Contact Centre Employee Engagement Report; and
4. Contact Centre Benchmarking Partner Programmes: benchmarking organisations against competitors, industry sector, best-in-class, national and international programmes.

## Online Publishing and Social Media

1. Online publishing and website information portal; over 9000 subscribers to news services; contact news Australia and NZ and Asia(regarded as the main source of new for the Asia Pacific contact centre industries); and

2. Social media strategy and research.

For more information about the results in this White Paper, please contact:

William Dieu	Level 4, 121 Walker Street
Senior Consultant	North Sydney NSW 2060
callcentres.net	8 Robinson Road
Telephone: +61 2 9927 3333	#10-00 ASO Road
Email: <a href="mailto:wdieu@callcentres.net">wdieu@callcentres.net</a>	Singapore 048544