



Our Journey to the Home Agent Model

Qnet Presentation May 26, 2010

Connecting you with the Future

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Who we are...

- Started Contact Centre Services in Winnipeg as Gage Marketing in 1997.
- Changed name to Archway Marketing Services in 2003.
- Changed name to **Skybridge Marketing Group** in 2008.
- Locations:
 - Winnipeg, MB
 - 500 Seats
 - Selkirk, MB
 - 200 Seats
 - Chicago, IL
 - Greenfield, MN (Head Office)



Customer Service

- Customer service inquiries / problem solving / customer retention
- Help desk and product support
- Order entry
- E-customer service, web page interaction (e-mail, e-chat, web, self-help)
- Customer surveys and data gathering / profiling
- Dedicated and shared call center specialists
- Multi-lingual support
- 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year



The Road to Home Agents

- Key business drivers for the initiative included:
 - ◆ **Space concerns**
 - ◆ **Employee satisfaction / Retention**
 - ◆ **Cost reduction**

- Challenges:
 - ◆ **Lack of information**
 - ◆ **Little guidance from Government Agencies**
 - ◆ **Where to start?**



The Top Three Business Drivers include:

➤ **Space concerns-**

- ◆ Expansion of clients and new business created a challenge with space.
- ◆ Needed a method to continue to expand without sacrificing our environment and employee satisfaction with their workspace.

➤ **Employee satisfaction / Retention-**

- ◆ Minimum wage continued to rise dramatically in 2009, and began to encroach closer and closer to our current starting wage.
- ◆ Experienced a 10 to 20 percent training drop off in the first 30 days, higher on accounts with a 3 to 4 week in class training.
- ◆ Attrition rates were on a rapid decline, but another means of continuing this decrease was needed.

➤ **Cost reduction-**

- ◆ As an outsource provider our margins are essentially based on our billable rate minus cost.
- ◆ Current economic situation in the U.S and the Canadian Dollar were having impacts.
- ◆ Identified Home Agents as an additional solution to reduce costs.



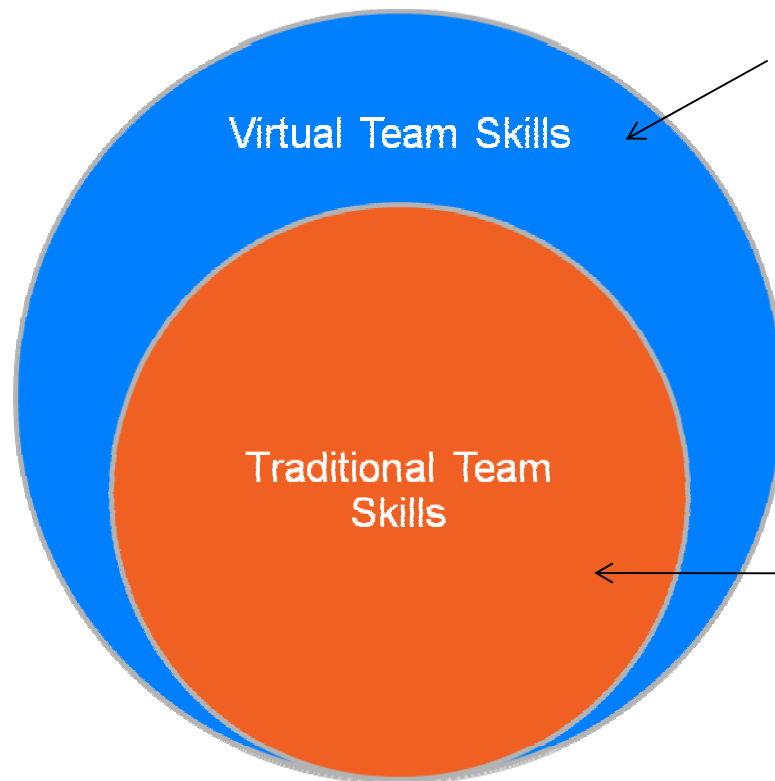
The Pilot

- Began Pilot program with 20 veteran Agents
- Selection based on performance, attendance and desire to work at home.
- Provided with computer, desk, headset, phone line and internet.
- Initial program was set up for 4 days home based and 1 day in the office.
- Dedicated Coach to support the Home based employees.
 - ◆ Maintain a max 20:1 ratio; ideal 15:1. Training requirements for pilot representatives was minimal. Already had job knowledge, systems knowledge etc.

Majority of training requirements needed was focused on the Coach.

- ◆ Presented a unique challenge to maintain a high level of engagement with remote employees.
- ◆ New approach to coaching and development.

The Differences



Virtual Team Skills

- Building trust in the team
- Precision in communication
- Technology know how/aptitude
- Ability to maintain a high level of engagement.

Traditional Team Skills

- Developing and articulating the team's objectives
- Mentoring team members
- Ensuring clear lines of communication
- Updating the team regularly on progress
- Measuring performance

Phase 2

- In August 2009, we identified that the home agent model was working, began to plan for expansion with some existing, but mostly new employees.
- We modified our approach slightly, and began to recruit externally. Agents provided their own computer, telephone line, internet etc.
- This approach provided additional savings, but did not compromise our ability to protect consumer information.
- Employees went through a multi level recruiting process.
 - ◆ Pre screen telephone interview.
 - ◆ Pre employment testing, focused on call centre tasks, aptitude and the ability to work independently.
 - ◆ Complete interview, and then invited to an information session.
 - ◆ Once selected, job offer contingent on home visit and remote tech test.

Phase 2 Success & Challenges

Successes

- Prospective Employees were applying for the opportunity to work from home, and not driven necessarily by the wage.
 - Increased flexibility to respond to clients with “odd” call patterns, and to accommodate limited schedules.
 - Significant savings no longer providing computers, desks and paying for telephone and internet.
 - Additional screening levels and employees driven by the opportunity, rather than the wage has driven down drop off and attrition.
 - Absenteeism and punctuality % of home agents is less than half of brick and mortar employees.
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- Only real challenge has been the time investment of home visits and tech tests.



Phase 3- Increase Market expansion

- Began to expand Home agents into the U.S. Able to place home agents into the Chicago area to support one of our Chicago based clients.
- Interview methods expanded to remote options- telephone, Skype etc.
- In May 2010, was able to transition all employees in our Selkirk facility to a Home Agent position, and will be closing the physical facility in Selkirk.
- **Challenge-**
 - ◆ Training was still conducted in person in leased space.
 - ◆ New employees came in daily for training before being deployed home.



Recent Developments

- Have begun to use an ELearning tool.
 - ◆ Training modules are all on line, interactive, chat and video.
 - ◆ Allow recruiting in remote areas that we don't have a presence or too far for employees to drive in daily for training.
- Hiring of remote Coaches.
 - ◆ Currently we have four remote Coach that manages a team of Home Agents.
 - ◆ Similar concept to Home Agent model, Coach receives incoming calls, but rather than Clients it is their team that will call; Escalations, questions, challenges.
- Closed Selkirk Office, and transitioned those employees to Home Agents.



Benefits



- Space Savings**
- Retention**
- Geographic area for recruitment**
- Diversity in Age demographic**
- Satisfaction of employees**
- Flexibility in schedules**
- Ability to expand PT to accommodate certain demographics**



- Attrition**
- Cost of space and technology**
- Training drop off**
- Employee relations issues**