

## Planning for Self-Service Growth

Most of us today operate in the world of multi-channel business. One of the challenges that might escape our immediate attention is tailoring the work force for the channel shift that will inevitably result from the gradual but continuous movement toward e-commerce and to the use of other self-service technology, such as Interactive Voice Response (IVR), in the call center. The speed at which this transition takes place will be determined by the ease of use of emerging technology, the continuing acceptance of that technology by the general public, the availability of low-cost access to the technology and, perhaps most of all, the extent to which businesses aggressively promote the technology as a choice for their customers and a cost-effective alternative for themselves.

A little bit of human resources planning in conjunction with forecasting and budgeting the growth of self-service will go a long way toward avoiding the costs of reacting on short notice to shifts in the way customers do business with you. It will also help allay the concerns of employees who see the signs of the shift and, in the absence of communication, assume the personal worst and respond accordingly.

Start with forecasting by channel. Look at the historical trend away from mail and phone order and toward the web and retail. Incorporate plans for the implementation of IVR and other self-service applications. Evaluate the skill sets required and the numbers and timing of future needs.

Then, communicate, communicate, communicate.

- the big picture - look at call center personnel needs in the context of overall growth plans. For example, the percentage of the business from phone orders may be expected to decline over time from 80 to 60%. If, during the same period, the company expects to grow from total sales of \$200MM from \$150MM, the change in manpower requirements for the call center may change little or not at all.

- plans to cross-train existing personnel in the emerging needs. Let your folks know they are key to your successful growth and that you will train and develop them as necessary for their continued contribution.

You won't necessarily want to broadly communicate this element of your personnel planning, but you will also want to incorporate the opportunity for attrition of marginally performing employees!

As it is with the organization's success in general, planning is critical to the smooth transition of personnel in support of shifts in the business. Do the planning, and, above all, communicate the plans so that your best employees, those in whom you are heavily invested and who are critical to your continued growth, don't fill the information gap with worst case scenarios that result in their defection to the competition.