

Columbia Sportswear

Columbia Sportswear Ventures into the Cloud with inContact

From its humble start as a hat business founded by German nationals who fled Europe in 1938, to a global corporation with five brands, Columbia Sportswear is made up of real people who are passionate about the outdoors. That passion also extends to delivering outstanding customer service. As their customer support inquiries increased, Columbia Sportswear knew they needed a new contact center solution to support seasonal call volumes, ecommerce, and their unique brands. With inContact, they've reduced talk time by an average of 20 seconds, grew sales orders 56% and revenue 59%, and garnered a customer satisfaction score of 92.3% even while call volumes increased 34%. The result is an astounding 1,346 man hours saved for the year.

Searching for the Ideal Contact Center System

Offering outstanding customer support is a primary mission for outdoor apparel manufacturer, Columbia Sportswear. But their PBX-based system had long been a bottleneck for their contact center and IT teams. In 2010, Kristina Coker, Enterprise Mobility & Telecommunications Engineer, created a Request for Proposal (RFP) with the ideal characteristics of a new contact center system including supporting a wider range of communication channels, scalability to satisfy seasonal call volumes, resiliency to outages, easy access to live call statistics, and easy to use so business owners could make system changes.

Kristina explains, "Our old call center placed a heavy burden on IT, because it was so inflexible. Our internal customers struggled to meet their business objectives because of the system's limited functionality. Making any type of change involved weeks of waiting until IT could implement it."

They were in the process of acquiring new offices so supporting these additional locations was important. And ecommerce was being added to their website so they needed to support SMS, chat, email, and click-to-call functionality. "We had a lot of changes on the roadmap, and we needed a solution that was stable, flexible, and scalable for our call center," says Kristina.

Seasonal Call Volumes Demand Scalability

As a highly seasonal business, Columbia Sportswear's customer inquiries peak as the holidays and winter approach. Their old call center wasn't scalable, so the phone system and telco's capacity were sized to accommodate peak call volumes, which was



“It's eye opening to look back at my original pie-in-the-sky RFP and to be able to say, yes, we definitely got everything we wanted with inContact.”

Kristina Coker

*Enterprise Mobility & Telecommunications Engineer
Columbia Sportswear*

“Leveraging the nimbleness and scalability of inContact is a huge benefit. I don't blink when asked to move 160 agents to a new facility.”

Kristina Coker

*Enterprise Mobility & Telecommunications Engineer
Columbia Sportswear*

expensive. They also couldn't easily adjust agents to different queues so some customer service teams were overwhelmed while others sat idle.

They also needed the flexibility to implement unique identification for their five brands which include Columbia Sportswear, SOREL, Mountain Hardwear, Montrail, and prAna. As Kristina explains, "Most people don't want to call Mountain Hardwear and hear 'Thank you for calling Columbia Sportswear.' Their first thought is 'Did I dial the wrong phone number?' Many of our reps take calls for multiple brands, but they needed to know which brand the customer was dialing in order to answer the phone with the proper greeting. inContact's Agent Interface gives all the information they need to be the voice of any brand."

More Flexible, Scalable System with the Cloud

With inContact, Columbia can manage agents in multiple buildings, states, even multiple countries on a single platform regardless of physical location, size of the team, call volume, or other normal constraints of a PBX-based solution. "inContact's call flow is in the cloud so we can take a call anywhere there's an internet connection and a working phone. When our call center manager wanted to move four agents into a distribution center, I didn't have to change any infrastructure. Before inContact, I would stress over the number of phone lines going into the building, getting the ACD phone to go through the telco to a different PBX, etc. Those concerns evaporated once we switched to inContact.

Columbia's contact center managers are no longer dependent on IT to make simple or complex changes. "We wanted the business owners to become responsible and make their own changes without needing IT. In fact, one of our contact center managers has been trained on the inContact system and can now create a new phone number and queue without needing our assistance." Managers can also get detailed reports that measure agent performance, live call statistics, and more. Previously, they pulled data from three separate systems so they often ended up with reports that painted different pictures, because the process was inconsistent.

They're also more resilient to outages and site emergencies. "If a building needs to be evacuated, if a phone switch goes down, or if call volumes exceed our anticipated peaks, the inContact system is quickly scalable. We can easily add more agents regardless if they're working from home or elsewhere – all they need is a computer and internet connection.

inContact also easily handles the unique needs of their ecommerce inquiries which tend to require more one-on-one time with an agent. "The customers want help deciding what to choose, so if they're trying to pick a SOREL boot, we'll ask them questions about how they plan to use it. With inContact we can easily scale our workforce to handle these types of calls. inContact also improves the customer experience, because we can determine how many agents we need during the holiday seasons so hold times are minimized as much as possible." Columbia's future plans include implementing inContact's Workforce Management solution to tie call volumes to agent scheduling.

Business

Manufactures and distributes outerwear and sportswear.
www.columbia.com

Challenges

- Heavy workload for IT to support inflexible system
- Multi-state, mixed PBX-based call centers caused team silos
- Highly susceptible to service outages
- Expensive to size infrastructure for peak call volumes
- Cumbersome reporting

Results

- Easy to use system allows business owners self-service/on-demand updates to their call flows and queues
- Nimble adjustment to business needs: scales agents and call capacity with seasonal peaks
- Greater resiliency to outages
- At-a-glance real-time statistics and historical widgets
- No firmware updates, no version compatibility issues, nothing to maintain