



DB&A Answers the Call to Help One of America's Leading Telecom Companies Improve Operations.



Within the past decade, the small-business segment became an important national and global force and a vital revenue producer for corporate giants such as BellSouth. In fact, small business represented a significant portion of BellSouth's multi-billion dollar annual revenue.

To ensure optimal service to its small-business customers, BellSouth augmented its state-of-the-art Call Center technology with a specially trained staff of Call Specialists at strategically located service facilities. However, company executives noticed a disturbing slowdown in customer consultations and problem-solving responses at the Small Business Call Center serving Kentucky and Tennessee—a great cause for concern since increased product sales and higher customer retention depended greatly on successful customer contact by their Call Specialists.

Key executives at BellSouth made a strong commitment to determine the reasons for the slowdown and reverse it, and called on DeWolff, Boberg & Associates (DB&A) to supply its unique brand of expertise and strategic concepts to develop a lasting solution.

Situation

Despite a great reputation, customers were leaving

Historically, BellSouth Call Specialists used pre-written scripts to respond to callers' questions, but rarely went beyond this to make product offers. At the same time, there was no real direction from Managers to correct the situation since there was no Management Operating System (MOS) in place—an important tool that ensures certain behaviors are performed throughout the organization to reach specific, measurable results.

"It's clear that DB&A has the ability to effect change in an organization. We were committed to that change, but they gave us the tools to make it work. It was their understanding of our people, plus their philosophy of ensuring that their clients 'own' the solution and resulting success, that made change a reality."

Assistant Vice President, BellSouth Small Business Services

Company:

BellSouth

(acquired by AT&T)

- 25 percent increase in revenue-per-call, despite lower call volume
- Increased daily communication to review results, new product promotions and best practices
- Changed recruiting practices to match candidates with new culture of accountability

The Manager-training program had also become diluted over the years. The Managers' style of supervision was generally minimal, amounting to "drive-by" coaching, and they were selected for promotion on a subjective evaluation of their knowledge and understanding of BellSouth, versus any proven management ability. The result was a drop in customer retention and the related increased revenue—vital elements of BellSouth's goals for the Call Center—due in large part to the overall inefficient handling of all calls and the delivery of an exceptional customer experience with each one.

Call Center management had implemented an internal pilot program that involved individual coaching of the Specialists on their selling approaches and techniques. Although revenue-per-Specialist increased dramatically by 150 to 300 percent, BellSouth realized that it was impractical to have Managers and Specialists constantly working one-on-one. Optimizing the team's time and performance—in addition to creating a stronger sales-focused attitude and culture—was going to require a more-objective program managed by outside consultants. That's when they called DB&A.

Implementation

An in-depth analysis from every angle

DB&A was chosen for its practical, down-to-basics approach and its belief that BellSouth could succeed without purchasing and installing expensive new systems. Immediately after being selected, DB&A conducted a comprehensive, two-week assessment of the Call Center and the fundamental elements that might be missing from the Managers' routines. How were they assigning work? What was the follow-up? How did they ensure that they were getting the right information from the Specialists?

During this intensive study, open meetings with all employees were conducted to discuss topics such as how to increase revenue in a competitive market, how to determine customers' specific communication needs, how to generate more employee involvement, and the considerations and steps involved in making a commitment to change and improvement. DB&A also studied BellSouth's long-term forecasting, short-term planning, work assignments, follow-up plans, reporting, and evaluations. Remote observations were also conducted, which revealed that the Specialists' offer rate dropped off significantly when Managers were not in their immediate area.

One interesting fact they learned was that customers wanted to talk to a true "Specialist" and not just a customer service rep. The Call Specialists, however, had a strong resistance to the selling process and stopped short of making product recommendations, preferring instead to simply do "damage control" or whatever it took to merely keep a customer happy.

As in many organizations, there was a corporate attitude that actually discouraged confrontation, and Managers found it easier to excuse ineffective behavior than address it, correct it and move Specialists to the next level of productivity. The result was very little accountability on the part of Managers, as well as the Specialists who reported to them.

At the same time, it became obvious that, as a group, Managers wanted to learn how to manage correctly, but didn't know where to begin. The analysis showed that they seemed to be doing the minimal amount of coaching and personnel development necessary.

Unlearning Bad Habits

Ultimately, this required a change in the culture of the Call Center. Not only did BellSouth Specialists convert from an "order-taking" role to a "selling" role, Call Center Managers learned how to be more effective supervisors.

In an effort to not only improve the Managers' skills, but also to help them "unlearn" their old ways of managing, eight management-development workshops were set up by DB&A in Knoxville, Louisville, and Memphis.

Feedback Based On Quantifiable Data

Each Specialist's call-handling time was compared to his or her average billed revenue. Armed with that information, Managers could then conduct a "quality walk-through" with each Specialist, focusing on specific aspects of a call and providing, as needed, positive feedback or negative feedback and detailed remedial coaching. Managers were also coached on how to conduct their own remote observations of calls in order to confirm whether their coaching had been successful or if further mentoring was needed.

Ongoing Communication

A somewhat obvious but neglected point was that communication to employees on a regular basis was essential. To achieve this, a weekly huddle meeting conducted by the Team Manager was established to review a variety of items, including previous results, new product promotions, and techniques that had been proven effective in helping Specialists work more effectively.

Visual Communications Boards were also set up throughout the facility and updated four times daily to relay branch-wide news and performance results to all areas.

"Off-the-Hook" Results

Taking ownership of a proven system

As it does with all of its clients, DB&A helped BellSouth take ownership of the systems after the consultants made specific recommendations. Responsibilities were then assigned to staff members to audit processes and ensure there was compliance with the new tools and that these tools continued to deliver results.

Amazingly, even though call volume declined during the months DB&A was engaged, the revenue-per-call rate rose by 25 percent—an improvement made even more significant due to the fact that there were fewer incoming calls. This significant increase in productivity per employee exemplified the change in culture BellSouth was hoping to achieve.

Recruiting practices also changed. The company began to seek candidates who were suited to its new environment, enjoyed a consultative role, understood BellSouth's goals, and could totally support customers by proposing relevant new products and services.

About DB&A

DB&A is a management consulting firm specializing in helping companies of every description achieve their objectives through improved performance and resource utilization. Working with every level of management, we focus on all organizational and cultural issues, with a special emphasis on developing accountability and leadership at the employee and front-line supervisory levels. DB&A consistently transforms organizations into high-performance, results-oriented teams and typically delivers a guaranteed gain in performance of at least 20 percent.

To learn more about what DB&A can do for your organization, please visit www.dbaresults.com, call us at 800-800-6030, or email us at contact@dbaresults.com.