

## CASE STUDY

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### Answering the Call: MCCI Grows with Avaya Contact Centre Solutions

Sponsored by: Avaya Inc.

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#### SITUATION OVERVIEW

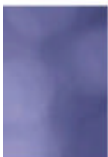
Right from the beginning, MCCI knew that its survival and success as a niche North American contact centre service provider would be predicated on its communications technology infrastructure.

Founded in April 2002, Multi Channel Communications Inc. (MCCI) entered the contact centre industry at a time when available capital was limited, sales cycles were elongating, offshore competition was increasing, and contract values were declining. Given that the troubled telecommunications and financial services industries were both in the midst of dramatic changes to their customer service approach, MCCI looked to carve a niche out for itself based on a more intimate human contact model. This would address perennial industry challenges such as the need to improve agent quality, reduce staff turnover, and adjust for industry seasonality. For this distributed contact centre service approach to work – and be accredited by prospective clients – MCCI knew that it needed advanced call routing and reporting functionality on a stable technology platform with the flexibility to meet its current client's needs and the scalability to accommodate future growth.

Since MCCI launched with its first 100 agents in early 2003, the firm has grown to 500 agents at its original Belleville site and another 450 agents at a second location in Peterborough, Ontario. Its distributed contact centre agent approach has provided its principal client with improved customer response times, up-to-the-minute reporting capability, and improved customer satisfaction ratings. Not only is MCCI's current client looking to expand its relationship, but the company is also facing such a strong sales funnel that it is expecting to launch a third contact centre site in early 2005. MCCI believes that the technological choices made early on have been key factors in its success to date, allowing it to focus scarce resources on business development and client satisfaction rather than on technological fire fighting.

The extent of MCCI's accomplishments in such a short period made the firm a loyal Avaya client – or rather, business partner. Not only did Avaya bring the technology breadth and industry depth that MCCI needed, but it also understood the dedicated culture and entrepreneurial spirit critical to getting a start-up off the ground quickly. While Avaya's technical expertise was clearly a major driver in its selection, the business understanding that Avaya brought to the inherent economic challenges in running a contact centre business made it stand out amongst its competitors – and is helping MCCI to do the same.

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## The Business Challenge

Until recently, double digit growth shielded the North American contact centre industry from the changing economic and competitive dynamics threatening to alter its underlying structure. Along with the traditional outsourcing benefits expected, including reduced operational costs and improved efficiencies, orders of magnitude improvement in service quality, customer satisfaction, and revenue generation are now expected value metrics to any service level agreement.

Without legacy technology influencing investment decisions, MCCI was in a unique position to develop an operational model flexible enough to address these dramatic industry changes. However, this approach put significant pressure on MCCI's technology choice beyond the typical price, performance and ease of use metrics. MCCI knew that its entire business model, the virtual contact centre structure, would need to be seamless to both its own staff as well as its client base in order for its business approach to be received by the industry. Advance routing was a requirement to compete in this market and MCCI needed to ensure that it acquired the best available solution on the market rather than something less expensive to save a few dollars. Unsure of its long-term growth needs, flexibility and scalability were key system requirements as was the compatibility of its systems with those of its current and prospective clients. MCCI had big needs - and equally big expectations of its core communications provider.

MCCI also had the forethought to consider investing in those solutions that would enable future migration to more advanced technologies, without requiring reinvestment in its foundational infrastructure. Rather than try to force fit future application investments, such as workforce management and call analysis tools, MCCI needed an infrastructure designed for straightforward integration. MCCI's initial business plan called for geographic expansion within a year, requiring a scalable infrastructure that would readily adapt to advanced and complex technologies such as VoIP.

Despite the years of experience MCCI's founders brought to the table, this start-up was also interested in finding a provider to assist in developing a long-term strategic communications technology and investment plan.

*"One of the good things about Avaya is that they helped to map out the strategy. So it wasn't like, 'here is a box and give us a call when you decide you need a second", stated Senior Vice President of Operations and MCCI co-founder, Stephen Haynes. "It was, 'Okay, here you are a start-up. Let's walk through your business plan...' Avaya helped us map our technology infrastructure to our business objectives, not the other way around."*

As it turned out, Avaya not only assisted MCCI in reshaping its infrastructure plan to even better meet its longer-term system requirements, it helped to short-circuit a potentially long application buying cycle by bringing partners to the table with application choices that were already proven to readily work with technology offerings of Avaya.

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## The Implementation

On top of its technical requirements, MCCI also required a communications infrastructure that would be stable and intuitive. While other technologies were initially considered, Avaya MultiVantage Communications Applications - backed by Avaya Cajun P882 Core Data Switches at both locations and a 24x7 maintenance agreement - was chosen as the robust and flexible solution set that would allow platforms to be networked together with minimal manpower requirements – a key requirement for this skeleton technology staff.

"We knew that as a start-up we weren't going to have an IT group that was 100 people strong that could develop the thing. So we needed an architecture to integrate these as we continued to grow," envisioned Adam SodoI, MCCI's IT Director.

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Rather than turn to a third party integrator to set up the first contact centre site, MCCI and Avaya worked together to get it running within months. Avaya was also there when the second site was launched, assisting in the implementation and ensuring complete integration with the hub based at the original site in Belleville.

- ☒ **Avaya S8700 Media Server.** Using two processes to ensure maximum uptime, this Intel-based S8700 IP-enabled solution running in a Linux operating environment can scale up to 36,000 stations, of which 12,000 can be IP stations. This is expected to give MCCI plenty of room to grow.
- ☒ **Avaya Communication Manager.** This particular technology is designed to support both circuit-based and IP-based telephony systems, which was critical for MCCI. Avaya Communication Manager includes enhanced voice command controls and encryption levels to secure calls. Admission control and bandwidth management are also part of the solution, and is considered to be well suited to MCCI's strategy of deploying distributed centres across hundreds of agents.
- ☒ **Avaya message servers.** Used at the Belleville location, all mailboxes on the Octel Message Server are accessed through a straightforward telephone user interface. The Avaya INTUITY AUDIX 770, used at the Peterborough site, has voice and text messaging capabilities as well as automated attendant and networking capabilities. When using Avaya Unified Communication Center, the IA770 can provide multi-modal access to messages through the telephone, PC graphical user interface and speech commands.

MCCI has found Avaya Call Management System High Availability R8 system to be a key value-add service for its clients. With real time access to the switch, MCCI can offer its client base up-to-the-minute reporting on its performance and readily prove its adherence to previously agreed-upon service levels. MCCI also implemented Avaya Best Service Routing (BSR) to route calls to the appropriate virtual contact centre facility and specifically to those agents best able to address the callers' concerns, in a seamless manner.

MCCI's application solution choices were deeply influenced by the close partnership it had with Avaya during these early stage development activities. MCCI selected Witness System's Blue Pumpkin workforce management applications and NICE for its call recording and call analysis requirements, both Avaya DevConnect partners. According to Stephen Haynes, Avaya helped MCCI narrow its criteria for solution selection but ultimately left the decision to the client. The result is an integrated hub-and-spoke system in which data can be pulled off the switch and matched to each system with limited effort by either business or technology teams.

MCCI is continually looking to expand on its capability and squeeze that extra bit of efficiency out of its technology investment. Its second site in Peterborough was implemented under extremely tight deadlines set by the client, and at the time both MCCI and Avaya decided to deliver just what was necessary to get the centre up and running. Now that it is approaching capacity, with 450 active agents and expectations to reach 500 within months, MCCI has again leveraged its relationship with Avaya and its partners to assess how to better balance the load between the two sites. As part of its client relationship, Avaya Global Services used on-site consultants to assess just how well the systems were working for MCCI.

"They did not come in and say, *'Hey, for another \$100,000 we will assess this for you.'* They just came in and did it as a part of their service to an Avaya client. For us [a fast growing start-up], that is just huge," claimed Stephen Haynes.

This is not to say that implementing these two contact centre sites was problem-free. The first site was implemented under the financial duress of a start-up organization, while MCCI still appears pleasantly surprised that they were able to pull off the second implementation given the challenging time constraints. It was during these periods when MCCI did notice longer than usual waiting intervals for certain newer parts or products to be shipped, due to a lack of stock in Canada. However, MCCI noted that Avaya always did its best to get those unexpected technology requests shipped from the US as quickly as possible and presented work-around solutions to meet its needs in the interim. Again, MCCI was impressed with the dedication offered by its Avaya contacts.

## The Benefits

Clearly, what has most impressed MCCI is the continued dedication of service offered by Avaya. Starting off as a small company with relatively minimal technology requirements compared to the larger centres springing up across Canada, MCCI had not expected Avaya to pay as close attention as it has over this two year relationship.

"From the very beginning they didn't seem like a vendor when we talked to them. They are a true partner with us," stated Stephen Haynes. "Some sales guy just wants to sell you a box. We're thoroughly impressed... Avaya is banking on our growth."

- ☒ **Avaya has offered solid reliability and service.** According to Adam Sudol, the Avaya system "just doesn't go down." Since its inception, MCCI has never had a single service disruption. On the rare occasions when a component has failed, redundant systems have automatically kicked in – to the point that often MCCI only becomes aware through the response of the Avaya 24x7 support team.
- ☒ **Avaya has embedded the needed flexibility into the solution for MCCI.** The Avaya commitment to open standards has meant a clearer integration path for MCCI with third party vendors. It has also helped ensure MCCI's ability to meet the strict service level agreements (SLAs) expected by its clients, through both the scalability and the robustness of the underlying infrastructure.
- ☒ **Avaya has helped MCCI keep IT labour costs low.** MCCI has only thirteen IT personnel, of which ten are tasked with help desk issues such as desktop system errors and spilled coffee on Avaya handsets. The system's stability has allowed MCCI to divert IT resources to value-added design and development tasks, while its intuitiveness has removed any need for IT professional training.

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Beyond the technological benefits, MCCI also noted two clear business benefits it considers instrumental in building this start-up:

- ☒ **Avaya has directly assisted MCCI in its sales efforts.** Not only has Avaya directly helped on lead generation front, it has effectively removed any technology concerns from the sales equation. "When we're out there selling," says Haynes, "no-one asks 'Why aren't you using some other technology?' There are simply no arguments about the validity of our core technology."
- ☒ **Avaya has facilitated MCCI's ability to prove its value to its client.** Since acquiring part of its contact centre operations, MCCI's major client was ranked highest among the seven largest US wireless service providers in satisfying customers who call their provider for service or assistance, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2004 Wireless Customer Care Performance Study.
- ☒ **Avaya has allowed MCCI to focus on its business, rather than its technology.** MCCI is in the enviable position of being a business process outsourcing company that can direct its attention to its core value proposition and not spend valuable time and money managing a cobbled-together, unstable system. "It's like, 'You are working with Avaya? Great. Next.'"

## Future Outlook

In a mere 24 months, MCCI has grown from a concept into a fledgling contact centre service provider with almost 1000 contact centre agents over two geographically diverse sites. MCCI considers Avaya a critical component of its rapid success and key to its future technology - and business - development plans.

☒ **Client expansion.** MCCI has been successful with its one marquee client, who has been the driving force behind its expansion to date. To diversify its client and revenue risk, MCCI is currently targeting a number of US telecommunication and financial institutions to obtain new contact centre clients. According to MCCI, Avaya is playing a key role in opening doors for it in the highly competitive US market place.

☒ **Geographic expansion.** Based on its client expansion plans, MCCI is clearly keeping an eye out for expansion possibilities to accommodate its select client base. MCCI's scouting effort for potential sites is a joint effort between MCCI's management team, IT personnel, and Avaya. Having assisted in the development of an infrastructure framework to support future growth, Avaya is now practically considered a member of MCCI's decision-making team.

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☒ **Communication network expansion.** Given that achieving stable, incremental revenue growth is the operational plan moving forward for MCCI, technology next steps are not about replacement but about the expansion and extension of its Avaya platform. MCCI is looking closely at a number of new Avaya applications, including:

☐ **Modular messaging.** Moving to modular messaging is being considered for MCCI's third site, slated for early 2005. The Avaya solution integrates with Exchange Server, remote devices, speech access and unified messaging solutions, while also conveniently working with the different messaging systems in Belleville and Peterborough. Its messaging solution offers seamless integration between the different systems currently being used by MCCI, without requiring costly replacement efforts for technology that is of fairly recent vintage.

☐ **A focus on IP.** MCCI is looking to increase its focus on IP, particularly through an investment in Avaya IP Telephony solutions. While Peterborough is currently on an IP-based network, including its handsets, Belleville has yet to be entirely migrated over and MCCI's third site will likely also be configured for a more robust IP configuration. In anticipation of this investment later in 2005, MCCI is already working on IP trunks as part of a best services routing strategy, partly on the advice of Avaya.

☐ **Migrating over to Extreme.** Now that Avaya will no longer be selling the Avaya AP882 Core LAN switch, which is implemented at both Belleville and Peterborough sites, MCCI will be migrating to Extreme Core Data Switches, while continuing to use the Avaya 10/100 PoE Cajun Switches to support the IP Telephones.

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## Essential Guidance

A start-up business is always faced with its own unique set of challenges, and for contact centers the biggest challenge (after finding the necessary investment capital) is to make sure that every call is answered and every customer is serviced in the most efficient and effective way possible. In order to ensure that this occurs, and that business and technology priorities are aligned right from the beginning, MCCI believes that it is key to build the technology infrastructure and core applications from the point of view of the switch.

MCCI needed technology suppliers that understood this fundamental industry concept and worked from that premise. MCCI has seemingly found that in Avaya. Yet, no implementation of this kind doesn't come with new knowledge for both partners:

- ☒ **Technology solutions must fit with business plans – not the other way around.** A true partnership can only occur between companies that take the time to understand each other's business vision and operational objectives. Sales representatives selling boxes solely on aggressive pricing usually add little value; those that see service as part of a long-term commitment are ones that can create success.
- ☒ **Industry knowledge is a key part of the overall technology package.** MCCI noticed that sometimes it's the small industry nuances that can make all the difference. Despite years of experience, inside industry knowledge from a provider can deliver a critical third set of eyes on an infrastructure layout – and on a business plan.
- ☒ **Good partners have good partners.** MCCI learned that it was perfectly reasonable for business process outsourcing providers to drive its technology and business process ecosystem off the switch. Rather than shop on its own for needed application software, Avaya was able to save MCCI a tremendous number of cycles by turning to its partner network to recommend a solution that would integrate with MCCI's proposed infrastructure and future scalability requirements.

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## Conclusion

Avaya clearly answered MCCI's call for a stable and robust call centre environment that would enable this Canadian start-up to focus from the beginning on building its business rather than its technology. The business relationship that has been struck between these two organizations illustrates the success that shared growth commitments can have for both parties. For MCCI, Avaya has clearly played an instrumental role in its rapid succession into a sizeable North American contact centre service provider. For Avaya, it can count MCCI as a loyal customer partner for years to come.

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## **About MCCI**

Multi-Channel Communications Inc.(MCCI) is a private, Canadian-based company serving the Global 100. MCCI was founded and funded in 2000 as a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) provider of inbound contact centre & related professional services. MCCI specializes in customer care solutions for US-based and international organizations in the Telecommunications, Wireless, Cable , Internet, and Financial Services industries. MCCI has almost 1,000 staff in multiple locations all within two hours travel from its head office in Toronto, Canada.

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