

CASE STUDY

Customers First: Avaya Powers Minacs' Media-Rich Sales Service Centre

Sponsored by: Avaya Inc.

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SITUATION OVERVIEW

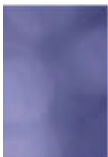
To continue its success in the increasingly competitive customer care outsourcing industry, Minacs understood that it would need to do more than put its own customers first – it would need all of its technology partners and suppliers to do the same.

Since entering the customer relationship management business in the 1980s, Minacs has successfully carved out a niche for itself based on its approach to customer service and the level of support provided by its underlying technology. Through various acquisitions, and a client roster spanning automotive, pharmaceutical, and financial services industries, Minacs has grown to almost 4,500 employees working in Canada, the United States, and Europe and logs over 100 million multimedia contacts annually in over 20 languages and across its 15 facilities located worldwide.

Minacs' operational strategy since the 1990's has focused on centralized contact centre solutions, driven by an advanced technology infrastructure backbone. Consolidating its communications platform on Avaya early, Minacs was looking to support its customer service value proposition by leveraging a communications provider that offered global coverage, robust switch and routing functionality, substantial load and redundancy capabilities, and had a fundamental understanding of the evolution of the modern contact centre. Over the past few years, as even more enterprises have shifted their focus from increasing market share to increasing customer care, Minacs realized the need to expand its value proposition and service mix by increasing its investment in multimedia-based technologies and further leveraging its partner/ technology suppliers.

In 2003, Minacs faced an RFP from a US-based Fortune 500 company looking to replace its current contact centre outsourcer with a more technologically-advanced, flexible, and cost-efficient provider. To adequately respond within the RFP's parameters, Minacs required a partner-centric solution team that could offer advanced multimedia-rich communications capabilities in a seamless, efficient environment. While the three-way partnership struck between Aliant, Avaya, and Minacs was foreign territory, all three providers were able to work under extremely tight deadlines and successfully overcome the inevitable hurdles that come with any advanced technology implementation, while putting this strategic client's service requirements first.

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The Business Challenge

The relationship between Minacs and Avaya stretches back to Minac's entrance into the customer care outsourcing service market. The two firms have grown and evolved together, each learning and developing their offerings together as they mutually look to penetrate their respective opportunities in the customer care industry.

Given the depth of the relationship, and its belief that Avaya's technology mapped well to its customers' evolving needs, Minacs did not consider another technology partner when responding to this RFP opportunity. However, a third party telecommunications provider was required to meet the RFP expectations, and this would put the technology-supplier relationship into the hands of Aliant. The primary challenge for Minacs in this three-way relationship was not so much the indirect nature in which it would now need to interact with Avaya, it was the requirement for all three parties to seamlessly work together for the mutual benefit of the end-client. Political issues, unionization, and different operational policies could not get in the way of a successful implementation.

In the case of the Halifax implementation, it took 8 months for Minac's prospective client to grant the RFP. The success of the RFP approval came its client getting a good read on Avaya's commitment to success: Avaya participated with Minacs in pre-RFP discussions, in business workshops, and finally in the implementation itself. Minac's acknowledges that Avaya's commitment to complete lifecycle participation, including upfront sales participation through to on-site Avaya expert support, was a key ingredient to the success of its RFP bid.

Due to the elongated sales cycle, Minacs found the required implementation timeframe significantly shortened. To compound the issues associated with this rush to execute the proposed contact centre solution, the three partners also found themselves facing a technology hurdle: Minacs, its project partners, its client, and Avaya Canada team members were in fact relatively unfamiliar with some of the newer Avaya technologies planned for the Halifax centre. Implementation problems were clearly expected – the question was now just how fast Avaya's service experts could react within the operational structure of this three-way partnership.

The Implementation

No complex implementation goes off without a hitch, and this particular implementation also ran into both technological and business issues in its rush to meet requirements in its four month allotted timeframe. However, Minacs' found that, overall, this complex Aliant/Avaya/Minacs solution went quite smoothly.

- ☒ **Avaya S8700 switch.** Minacs chose the S8700 because of its ability to process up to 300,000 call completions and support up to 36,000 stations. According to Minacs, the S8700 also allowed for 8,000 trunks to support the demands of large multi-national corporations, as well as the flexibility to move to IP stations when it was ready to do so
- ☒ **Avaya Communication Manager.** Minacs' Halifax centre uses Avaya Communication Manager 1.1 to integrate telephony call processing, call control, messaging, contact center, and an application-programming interface into a scalable architecture. This architecture supports both circuit-based and IP-based telephony, and offers enhanced voice command controls, high levels of encryption for secure voice calls, and call admission control and bandwidth management.
- ☒ **Avaya Interaction Center.** Minac's confirmed that Avaya Interaction Center was central to its ability to map to its customer's RFP. The software supports both inbound and outbound customer interaction, empowering agents to Web browse during a call while also handling multiple simultaneous contacts when practical. Agents can be blended across one or more of the inbound media of voice, email, or web, or handle outbound voice interactions generated through campaign management initiatives. Minacs believed implementing Avaya Interaction Centre would simplify customer interactions while ensuring consistent segmentation and personalization, while also allowing for cross-selling and up-selling opportunities.
- ☒ **Avaya Operational Analyst.** Another high value piece that helped secure a successful RFP response was Avaya Operational Analyst, a business intelligence tool used to analyze the customer experience and operational effectiveness of interaction centers. Avaya Operational Analyst enables Minacs to consolidate real-time and historical multichannel interaction data into a single business intelligence reporting and analysis tool.

The application Avaya Interaction Center (IC) was central to Minacs being able to map to its customer's RFP

During the implementation of the Avaya Interaction Center and Avaya Operational Analyst tools, all three companies had on-site technical teams addressing functionality issues. Meetings were held daily, with each company bringing in about three representatives, with additional resource requirements assessed as needed.

One complication facing the team early in the implementation was a physical move to a new Halifax facility in the spring of 2004. Aliant, Avaya, and Minacs tactical teams were able to shut down the contact center after the centre closed, physically move the hardware down the street, and have the new center up and running the next morning without losing one scheduled hour of operation. Despite the time pressure, logistical complexities, and physical requirements, it was all completed overnight with no disruption to the client - or their clients.

The Benefits

One of the biggest benefits Avaya brought to the table was not only its technology expertise, but also its experience in working through third-party IT outsourcing providers. While both Aliant and Minacs were familiar with Avaya, and familiar with each other, both were relatively unfamiliar with this particular three-way relationship. However, two years following this implementation, the message coming from Minacs is clear. Joan Middleton, the VP of the Project Management Office for Minacs, notes the speed of the implementation and the depth of Avaya's commitment - including allowances for value-added services: "Avaya's responsiveness and timeliness were excellent." Joan Middleton also noted a number of additional business and technological benefits Minacs has had working with Avaya:

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- ☒ ***The strength and flexibility of the Avaya solution supports increased business.*** In Minac's view, the advanced functionality and reliability offered by the Halifax implementation makes it's overall corporate value proposition increasingly attractive to companies debating in-house versus outsourcing contact centre solution approaches.
- ☒ ***Avaya frees up Minacs to focus on core competencies.*** The stability of Avaya's solution meant that Minacs did not have to worry about the technology itself, and could focus its efforts its applicability to meet the needs of its client. According to Joan Middleton, Avaya simply "has a very stable product that met our business needs." For Minacs, it also meant that it's client could make the same claim – the ability to forget about the technology, and focus on the business.
- ☒ ***Enhanced data mining capabilities.*** The customer-driven, media-rich solution at the Halifax centre provided Minacs with a wealth of customer information from which it could directly and indirectly tweak its service to best meet its own internal efficiency goals as well as improve service to its client.
- ☒ ***Enhanced customer experience.*** Offering better response times, stable accessibility, increased flexibility, deeper informational insights, and multiple access paths to that information, Minac's believes that Avaya is a critical component to its delivery of the best possible service to its client base.
- ☒ ***Fast implementation.*** As Joan Middleton claimed, "time was key and we had a very short window." Given the complexity of the product, the location, and the fact that three parties were responding to a fourth party's RFP, the successful four-month implementation was clearly, in part, thanks to technology.

Avaya has a very stable product that met our business needs

Avaya Canada also brought to the table the experience of its US team, which was a big value-add for this particular implementation. When issues arose during the implementation phase, either in the lab or live, Avaya made its entire resource team available. The Avaya Canada implementation and support teams were much larger than the direct resources assigned to this project – Avaya's worldwide product and services team response times to technology issues identified by Minacs and Aliant clearly demonstrates the corporate-wide dedication to the successful implementation of this very important Canadian-based client.

Future Outlook

Over the past 12 months, it has become clear that divergent forces in the customer care business process outsourcing (BPO) services market have been both pushing and pulling the direction of the industry. While some of these forces have been counter to the growth of the marketplace, other dynamics are certain to spur more larger Fortune 500 organizations to turn to external contact center service providers and outsourcers for the expertise that they and their customers require.

The implication of this market acceleration has been notable changes in the industry's composition and competitive dynamic. IDC has witnessed noticeable increases in merger and acquisition activity, the diversification of larger firms into nontraditional customer care services areas, the investment of traditional IT services firms into BPO, and the growing acceptance of "near" and "offshore" service models. To compete, Minacs has recognized that it must continue to expand its business and technological capability to sustain its growth moving forward.

- ☒ **Building from a core infrastructure foundation.** Avaya's software, services, and hardware are the standard upon which Minacs has chosen to run its business. As Minacs looks to expand its capabilities, and win customers with a global business focus, it will continue to turn to Avaya who it believes offers the necessary implementation and support capabilities. By continuing to consolidate on a standard platform, Minacs feels it can do business anywhere in the world.
- ☒ **Investment in leading edge technology.** The dedication of Avaya to the customer care space is particularly important to Minacs, particularly with regards to investment in areas such as VoIP and related Web-based media. As the need and demand for multi-channel contact centers continues to expand, Minacs will want to do its best to stay ahead of the competition.
- ☒ **Future partnerships.** The matching of Minacs' client's RFP to Avaya's offering was a good example of how in tune Avaya is to marketplace developments, and bodes well for the close integration of Avaya's product development with the needs of companies like Minacs. Given that the relationship with Avaya is ongoing, it's likely that the strategic visions of the two companies will be increasingly complimentary.
- ☒ **Positioning Halifax as a cornerstone for growth.** According to Minacs, Avaya's multi-media offering is scalable and flexible such that it fits well with Minacs' strategic plan, and should play a role in future business development. The Halifax centre is positioned to be the cornerstone to further rollouts for Minacs, particularly for sales-driven environments, and Minacs is counting on Avaya to help adjust its infrastructure to accommodate that growth.

ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE

Such a three-party technology partnership venture was essentially foreign territory for Minacs, Aliant and Avaya. Combined with the need for the existing center to be completely revamped, new multi-functional agents added, and a new physical layout created, all three were particularly cognizant of the inherent risks this venture brought to the table.

- ☒ **Knowledge transfer was key.** Minacs found that implementations of this magnitude run more smoothly if the business and technical processes are well documented, so that fixes and/or changes can be handled efficiently and effectively.
- ☒ **In such a shared service environment, it was key that roles were clearly documented and simplified to avoid confusion.** In Minac's case, it was decided that both Avaya and Aliant were charged with providing the integrated platform with Aliant owning the switch, while Minacs would pay Aliant on a per seat basis – a new and relatively unfamiliar role for Minacs. Without clearly delineated roles for each partner and for each member of their team, the risk of confusion and increased tension could put a successful implementation at risk.
- ☒ **Developing an accountable escalation path was critical.** Avaya was implementing in Halifax, far from both Canadian and US support. In tandem with the need for role documentation, escalation procedures for support had to be transparent and rapidly identifiable in order to meet project objectives.
- ☒ **Inter- and Intra-team communications were critical.** Whenever there is more than one stakeholder in the implementation process, a consistent "check-in" process must be established to make certain everyone is on the same page. Without this, the escalation of issues wouldn't have happened so quickly and neither would have the solutions.
- ☒ **Building an on-site lab for robust testing prior to implementation avoided a number of potential issues.** Rather than stumbling upon a need, Minacs found that building a testing environment from the beginning, particularly for implementations within existing structures, can be critical for early success. While it did not itself have this at the outset, Minacs learned early that one would be necessary for a smooth transition and made the investment along with Avaya.

Escalation procedures for support must be transparent and rapid.

Conclusion

Minacs and Avaya have developed a deep business relationship since Minac's inception, one that has been further solidified by their joint experience implementing the sales contact centre in Halifax. This new business operational model has proven to be successful, thanks to the dedication of all parties involved, and appears to offer Minacs further opportunity for growth and expansion in an increasingly competitive market space.

About Minacs

Founded in 1981, the company has grown from a small, privately held enterprise with four employees to a publicly traded, global corporation. Minacs provides BPO solutions centered on three core areas of capability — contact center solutions, integrated marketing services, and back-office administration — buttressing three areas of service — customer relationship management, human resources, and administration. The company specializes in providing targeted CRM utilizing database marketing, multichannel customer contact centers, and Web-enabled processes. Solutions in human resources provide extensive workforce management opportunities and make employee care a personalized, priority service.

Minacs' professionals work with clients to help them acquire and manage relationships with their customers at all stages of the customer life cycle. The company's 4,250 employees are located in 15 sites in Canada, the United States, and Europe. They provide services in 24 languages to millions of customer contacts each year.

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