

CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

Background

The Chicago Sun-Times is a daily newspaper published in Chicago, Illinois, available in print and online at suntimes.com. The first edition was published in 1948 when the Chicago Sun merged with the Chicago Daily Times. Today, the Sun-Times reaches more than 92,000 print readers and is sold in over 4,100 retail outlets.

The Problem

Like so many of the nation's 1,300 daily newspapers, several years ago the Chicago Sun-Times faced a need to streamline operations. Beginning in 2007, the Sun-Times outsourced printing and delivery. Soon thereafter, we did the same with our Customer Service functions, moving these responsibilities to a company in Central America.

While the move reduced stress on the Sun-Times' local staff, it created challenges for subscribers. With an international Customer Service team that operated so far away from the rest of the Sun-Times team, the quality of the service provided began to drop. Some readers faced language or communication barriers. Others had negative reactions to outbound calls requesting credit card numbers for renewal. And, unfortunately, responsiveness to issues was regularly slower than desired.

More than
92K
print readers

Only
4.1K
retail locations

More than
27%
reduction in
bi-weekly costs

The Solution

The Sun-Times heard this feedback and made the decision to return the Customer Service function to the United States when the contract term expired. The goal was to perform the transition to maximize cost savings, improve service to Sun-Times subscribers and build a better working relationship with our new partner.

During the process, we vetted a number of call center companies, and eventually chose to work with Millennial Services. Logan Rush presented his company as a Midwest-based problem-solving organization that was prepared to address the unique challenges facing Sun-Times subscribers. The fact that his CSRs were located in the Midwest was a significant plus.

When the transition occurred, Sun-Times touted the fact that the call center had returned to the United States, creating jobs for Americans. The feedback from subscribers was overwhelmingly positive. Millennial was new to the newspaper industry, so three key managers spent two days in Chicago working with the circulation system and learning terminology, processes and key metrics. The staff that they chose to man the phones was trained well in advance and hit the ground running.

The results of the switch have been exceptional. There has been a 27% reduction in bi-weekly costs. The abandoned rate is much closer to the agreed-upon goal of 5% which helps us ensure consistent staffing levels. Previously, with results far under the established goal, we were required to increase staffing and therefore increase costs.

Technology

The Millennial team uses Kerauno for call tracking and their related softphone, Bolt, for voice over internet phone calls, permitting each agent to answer phone calls from their computers and management to monitor agent performance through Kerauno reporting and recorded phone calls. Through Millennial Service's partnership with Kerauno the team is provided with a round robin call system to ensure no more than 5% of phone calls go unanswered, along with accurate reporting to measure agent performance and metrics such as average call time, average customer hold time, and call abandoned rate. Working with Millennial Services, the call abandonment rate has reduced significantly, providing a better customer satisfaction level, but also allowing for staffing levels to be consistently maintained.

The End State

Millennial has been able to address every challenge they have been given. When we increased home delivery prices, they handled the change with minimal problems. They learned about special inserts in the print product and they have been a key player as we encourage subscribers to select a convenient auto-pay option.

This new Customer Service solution has dramatically improved the service we are able to provide our readers and subscribers and has solved many of the issues that we faced for years with a less successful outsourcing solution.